

***The Politics of Memorialisation in Namibia:
Reading the Independence Memorial Museum***

Alexandra Stonehouse

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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Abstract

The Independence Memorial Museum is the latest addition to the post-independence memorial landscape by Namibia's ruling party, South West African People's Organisation (or the Swapo Party). Like many other southern African liberation movements turned ruling political parties, Swapo has looked towards history to find legitimisation and support in the present. This is referred to in this research as the creation of a Swapo master narrative of liberation history. It is a selective and subjective re-telling of history which ultimately works to conflate Swapo with the Nation. As such, Swapo has been portrayed as the sole representative and liberator of the Namibian people, and anything which effectively contradicts this has been silenced or purposefully forgotten within official or public history. This study takes as its starting point the removal of the colonial era Rider Statue in 2009, to make way for the new museum. The site, a significant landmark with regards to the Herero and Nama genocide, had remained effectively untouched both pre and post-independence as the city built up around several German colonial monuments. In order to understand why such a change in the memorial landscape would occur, and in a turnaround from the National Policy of Reconciliation that opted to protect all historical monuments as heritage after independence, this study looks to the Swapo master narrative of liberation history to explain the motivations behind building an Independence Memorial Museum. As such, the museum was thematically analysed with reference to the master narrative, and it was found that the same inclusions and exclusions, emphases, and silences were continued and consolidated within the museum. This study considers what narrative is put forward by the museum and why, and contemplates what opportunities were lost. The continued silences within Namibian official history constitute a sustained injustice to the people of Namibia.

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*All the images included were taken by the author.

Introduction

Amidst public controversy over the removal of the German colonial era Rider Statue (Reiterdenkmal) in 2009, construction began on the Independence Memorial Museum in the capital city of Windhoek, Namibia. The Rider Statue had stood atop a hill in central Windhoek for almost a century, placed there when Namibia was German South West Africa under colonial rule. The parliamentary order to remove the statue ignited public debate about the ‘rewriting of history’ and destruction of heritage as those who opposed the removal claimed, and those who saw this as an opportunity to put an end to the positive commemoration of the violence perpetrated by German colonial rule. This would pre-empt by several years the memorial politics that gripped South Africa during the student movement Rhodes Must Fall at the University of Cape Town in 2015, with echoes of the same debates playing out across various media platforms. Students protested at the university with demands for the removal of the statue of the imperial colonial figure Cecil John Rhodes on campus, a symbolic move towards the wider call for decolonisation of the university. In 2017, across the United States of America, similar protests and conversations occurred concerning confederate era statues and memorials. Statues, it would seem, can spark virulent debates about the meaning of monuments from the past in the present. Namibia’s own colonial era statue, the Reiterdenkmal, commemorated the German lives lost in the Namibian German war of 1904-8. The events of this war are now designated the first genocide of the 20th century, where the German colonial army (Schutztruppe) brought about the demise of thousands of members of the Herero, Nama and other minority ethnic groups. In 2009 the Reiterdenkmal was removed by an order of parliament, to make way for the impending Independence Memorial Museum. Five years later, on the 21st of March 2014, the Independence Memorial Museum was inaugurated by President Hifikepunye Pohamba in celebration of Namibian Independence Day. The museum was designed and constructed by the North Korean firm Mansudae Overseas Project, who also constructed and completed Heroes’ Acre in 2002 and the State House of Namibia in 2008. The Independence Memorial Museum represents the latest stage of how Namibian liberation history in the struggle for independence has been officially written and sanctioned by the state.

The Independence Memorial Museum is an imposing structure that stands high on what has been described as the ‘crown’ of the city of Windhoek, visible from most vantage points in and around the capital. Alongside it were unveiled two new monuments, a statue of Namibia’s officially designated founding father and first president Sam Nujoma, and the ‘Genocide Memorial Statue’ for the Herero and Nama Genocide of 1904-8. Together, these three acts of memorialisation mark the latest official addition to the memorial landscape (or memoryscape) by Namibia’s ruling political party, South West African People’s Organisation (Swapo).¹ This renewal of the memoryscape marks a decisive break with the surrounding colonial era monuments. The five-story black glass and gold-plated modern structure physically overshadows the colonial architecture of the Alte Feste Fort (German Schutztruppe fort built in 1890) and the Christuskirche (Church of Peace, 1910), and replaced the Rider Statue (1912) entirely. German Namibian sociologist Reinhart Kössler notes that until 2009 “the colonial composition of what may be called the city crown had been left virtually untouched”.² As such, the new constructions pose a countering to the monolithic colonial memoryscape that was left in place for over one hundred years, one which presents a version of history which explicitly celebrated colonialism and colonial violence. Sabine Marschall, a Professor of Cultural and Heritage Tourism at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, explains that unlike “many other African countries, which largely dismantled the insignia of the old order after attaining independence from colonialism, the new Namibian government decided against a radical, iconoclast policy. This was done in the spirit of reconciliation, but also – very importantly – to avoid alienating the economically important white sector of the population”.³ This begs the question of why, in 2009, nineteen years after independence, a monumental shift in the capital’s memory landscape would occur with the removal of the Rider Statue. One theory, and one that fits with the forthcoming analysis of the Independence Memorial Museum, is that amidst growing criticism and disillusionment with the Swapo Party, the new memoryscape can be read as an investment in reminding the nation that it was Swapo who liberated them.

¹ Capital letters (SWAPO) indicate the party in its state as a liberation movement, as opposed to the post-independence Swapo Party.

² Reinhart Kössler, 2015, “Namibia’s Century of Colonialism – a Fragmented Past in an Unequal Society”, in *Namibia and Germany: Negotiating the Past* (Windhoek, Namibia: University of Namibia Press): 29.

³ Sabine Marschall, 2009, “Culture Heritage Conversation and Policy”, in *Landscape of Memory* (Brill): 31

Therefore, while countering the singular colonial version of history that had monopolised the memorial landscape of the city's crown, the renewed memorial site presents its own particular interpretation of history, as any monument or museum must necessarily do. To remember and remind is a core function of memorialisation. To remember the victims, the perpetrators, those in-between, the places, the victories and losses. However, we can also acknowledge the socially constructed nature of conceptualising and recalling the past. History, memory and truth are not neutral or objective in nature. Instead, they are produced and reproduced through thoughts, actions, discourses, politics and power, in both the public and private realm. Jeffery Olick and Joyce Robbins write that history "is written by people in the present for particular purposes, and the selection and interpretation of 'sources' are always arbitrary. If 'experience', moreover, is always embedded in and occurs through narrative frames, then there is no primal, unmediated experience that can be recovered".⁴ This means that memory and history are not just forms of recalled reality, but are inevitably distorted by perception both past and present, on a personal, collective or national level. For example, autobiographical memories of individuals always have a unique perspective to them – hundreds of witnesses can remember differing (and sometimes conflicting) details of the exact same event. Memory, recollections and commemorations of the past are thus always occurring within the realm of the subjective.

The very nature of our relationship to the past is such that it must be "produced in the present and is thus malleable".⁵ The production of the past in the present can be a "manipulation of the past for particular purposes", or the "inevitable consequence of the fact that we interpret the world – including the past – on the basis of our own experience and within cultural frameworks", both of which lead to selectivity and subjectivity.⁶ Elke Zuern, who has written extensively on Namibian memorial politics, argues that memorials offer "stylized presentations of the past, highlighting and glorifying certain actors and actions while purposefully forgetting others", sanitising and 're-remembering' sometimes contested

⁴ Jeffery K Olick and Joyce Robbins, 1998, "Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices", *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 110.

⁵ Olick and Robbins, 1998, "Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices": 128.

⁶ *Ibid.*

histories.⁷ To remember is not then the simple recollection of a default or objective reality, and to memorialise is unavoidably subjective and selective. In a paradoxical way, to remember necessitates forgetting. Thereby, in the act of memory, in order to remember one thing, others must be at least temporarily be forgotten. In the case of memorialisation, where memory is inscribed into the physical world, there are practical limits to remembering. How can one properly and fairly commemorate every victim of the Nazi regime in one memorial, when different groups were targeted and treated in different ways and for different reasons? Memorials and those who implement them make choices about who and what to memorialise, and while this can be more expansive in a museum compared to a traditional memorial like a monument or statue, it will nevertheless remain subjective and selective.

This study thus aims to show how the particular version of history presented in the Independence Memorial Museum is subjective and selective specifically in the way in which it is deliberately and explicitly Swapo orientated. My research interest in the Independence Memorial Museum began with a visit in July 2016, where I was struck by the one-sided nature of the museum and its location at one of the historical centres of the Nama and Herero genocide. The Independence Memorial Museum, the new statues and the surrounding older colonial monuments are all situated on the site of Orumbo rua Katjombondi. Translated to ‘place of horror’ from the Herero language, this was one of several German concentration camps where thousands Herero and Nama people were wilfully murdered and left to perish in dire conditions during the genocide from 1904 to 1908. While the ‘Genocide Memorial Statue’ counts towards the commemoration of this particular space, it is difficult to imagine a museum dedicated to Polish independence situated on the site of Auschwitz. Attempting to understand why such a thing could occur in Namibia involves understanding a longer history of how official memorialisation has taken place in Namibia, and how Namibian history itself has been written, shaped and used by those in power. A condensed version of key historical events will follow, in order to allow for the important contextual understanding of Namibia in the 21st century and later analysis of the history presented at the Independence Memorial Museum.

⁷ Elke Zuern, 2012, “Memorial Politics: challenging the dominant party’s narrative in Namibia”, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 50(3): 495.

Key historical events

Namibia is a large country in southern Africa with a population approximately 2.4 million people. Like other countries in the region, its history is inextricably tied with that of violent settler colonialism. The following section will outline a brief history of Namibia under German colonialism and South African occupation, necessary for later critique of the Independence Memorial Museum. Without falling into the ongoing colonial-ideological trap that African history begins with colonialism, because struggle history only concerns the fight for self-determination, events before the period of German colonialism will not be expanded upon here.⁸

Thus we look to 1884, when the area of Namibia's south-western coast was declared German South West Africa by German chancellor Otto von Bismarck, amidst the 'scramble for Africa' taking place in the western world. It did not take long for this protectorate territory to expand through the use of 'protection treaties', which in the words of political analyst Henning Melber were "designed to prevent the re-establishment of any African hegemonic structure in the southern and central parts of the territory".⁹ This prompted armed resistance from local Herero and Nama populations, who had previously lived well on the land with cattle and agriculture. Under these worsening conditions, the Herero people were the first to collectively take up arms. Melber notes that the war of "1904 to 1907 was, under the existing social conditions, a simple act of self-defence and a desperate effort to regain autonomy".¹⁰ In October of 1904, the war escalated into a full-scale genocide with General Lothar von Trotha's infamous extermination order which read (in part): "Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at".¹¹ The first stage of the genocide saw Herero people forced to flee into the Namib Desert, where wells were poisoned by German soldiers and

⁸ For a discussion of this postcolonial criticism of African historiography, see Mahmood Mamdani, 2001, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43(4).

⁹ Henning Melber, 2010, "Economic and Social Transformation in the Process of Colonisation: Society and State Before and During German Rule", in *State, Society and Democracy: A Reader in Namibian Politics*, ed. Chistiaan Keulder (Windhoek: Macmillan Education Namibia): 28, 29.

¹⁰ Melber, 2010, "Economic and Social Transformation in the Process of Colonisation": 34.

¹¹ Taken from Jan-Bart Gewald, 1994, "The Great General of the Kaiser", *Botswana Notes and Records* 26: 68.

men, women and children were left to die from dehydration and starvation. The second stage was the implementation of concentration camps, where thousands were worked, starved and beaten to death, or succumbed to disease in the dire living conditions. The extermination order was soon applied to the Nama in 1905. Sexual violence against Herero and Nama women was utilized as a tool of war, and the resulting pregnancies have left a significant proportion of the affected communities today without knowledge of the ‘German side’ of their family tree, constituting an ongoing spiritual harm felt by those in the Herero culture.¹²

Only many decades later, however, would this come to be recognized as a genocide, and the first one of the 20th century. The United Nations (UN) Genocide Convention defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”, including killing, “causing serious bodily or mental harm”, deliberate “inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”.¹³ The explicit nature of von Trotha’s order evidences the intention to destroy the Herero people (and later the Nama) – not only to destroy them physically but also their entire way of life. In 1985, the UN Whitaker Report, a new report on genocide prompted by an investigation of the Armenian Genocide, conferred recognition of the acts and intentions of the German colonial army to exterminate the Herero and Nama peoples in Namibia as a genocide. Despite this, there are still ‘revisionist’ attempts to dismiss the genocide as an ordinary colonial war and among the German Namibian community a reluctance to acknowledge or engage with the reality of the genocide. David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen point to the condemnation by some members of the German Namibian community of the use of the term ‘concentration camp’ or *Konzentrationslager* – their response is to show that the term was in fact used by the Schutztruppe at the time.¹⁴ David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen’s *The Kaiser’s Holocaust* is an attempt to reclaim a history of the genocide that had been forgotten, and explicitly show how Germany’s actions in Namibia paved the way for the genocidal policies of Nazism. There were five concentration camps in existence

¹² Esther Muinjangu, 2018, personal communication with author, February 7.

¹³ “Genocide”, United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, accessed January 10, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.html>.

¹⁴ David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen, 2011, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust* (London: Faber and Faber): 351.

at the time of the genocide, the largest had a capacity for seven thousand and was situated in Windhoek on the very land on which the Independence Memorial Museum now sits.¹⁵

The Ovambo people, largely unhampered by German authorities in their Northern territory, participated only marginally in the war and were not targeted by the genocide orders. This is important to note for the post-independence narrative of struggle history, where the acts of resistance by Nama and Herero communities are overshadowed by that of the predominantly Ovambo populated SWAPO movement. The San and Damara people, while not named in extermination orders, were also affected by the genocidal policies of 1904-08. By the end of 1908, it is estimated that “less than half of approximately 20 000 members of the Nama communities survived the battles, or the imprisonment and forced labour that followed their destruction”.¹⁶ For the Herero, it is estimated that 80 percent of the population were murdered, including women, children and non-combatants.¹⁷ The effects of the loss of land, cattle and wealth are still felt by these communities today.¹⁸ Only in 1908 were the concentration camps disbanded, although hostilities did not cease.¹⁹ Of those who survived the concentration camps, “almost all were forced into the status of slave labourers in the service of the colonial economy”.²⁰

With the enormous death toll within the Police Zone (the central and southern areas under direct German control), a shortage of labour ensued and therefore a system of migrant labour was introduced, forcing many Ovambo men from the Northern region to leave their homes and land.²¹ This destroyed many ways of life for the Ovambo people, both for those migrants who were exploited and forced to leave and for those left behind. In less than two decades, German forces had murdered and pillaged the people it had violently colonised, irrevocably damaging indigenous ways of life, economy and culture. The effects of the genocide on the Herero and Nama communities continue to be realised today.

¹⁵ Olusoga and Erichsen, 2011, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*: 162.

¹⁶ Melber, 2010, “Economic and Social Transformation in the Process of Colonisation”: 36.

¹⁷ Jeremy Sarkin, 2009, *Colonial Genocide and Reparations Claims in the 21st Century: the socio-legal context of claims under international law by the Herero against Germany for genocide in Namibia, 1904-1908* (United States of America: Greenwood Publishing Group): 5.

¹⁸ Olusoga and Erichsen, 2011, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*: 355.

¹⁹ Sarkin, 2009, *Colonial Genocide and Reparations Claims in the 21st Century*: 19.

²⁰ Melber, 2010, “Economic and Social Transformation in the Process of Colonisation”: 37.

²¹ *Ibid*: 39.

After Germany's defeat in World War I, the Treaty of Versailles (1919) transferred the territory of German South West Africa to the Principal Allied and Associated Power, who in turn gave mandatory power to the Union of South Africa in 1919, under the supervisory power of the League of Nations. South Africa quickly went about creating an apartheid state in South West Africa (as it was renamed). The policy of creating "Native" reserves, begun under German colonial rule, was integral to this mission. The reserves became a supply chain for cheap labour, with economic dependency on the settler capitalist economy ensured via the inability to live off the meagre land in the reserves. In Urban areas, much like in South Africa, black people were forced to live on the periphery in 'locations'. White hegemony was cemented via "differentiation in the wage structure and the exclusion of the majority of the population from decision-making".²² Resistance to South African rule began as early as the 1920s, with various political movements that while institutionally weak, laid the foundations and began a long history of protest. The Bondelswartz Rebellion of 1922 and the Rehoboth Revolt of 1925 were to establish "a pattern, that of petitions by the communities concerned to the League of Nations and to its successor, the UN" that would continue into the SWAPO era.²³ Labour action in the mining and fishing industries "kept the embers of resistance burning" from 1922 to 1953.²⁴

The question of the mandatory's power over the mandate was never properly legally defined, and this ambiguity "was manifestly exploited by successive South African governments, who refused to recognise that sovereignty vested in the inhabitants" of the mandated territory.²⁵ Thus began the international legal disputes around South African control of South West Africa. As early as 1945, when South Africa Prime Minister Jan Smuts petitioned to have the territory of South West Africa incorporated into the Union of South Africa, the UN refused Smuts and demanded that South West Africa be bought under the UN Trusteeship Committee as all other mandates had been. South Africa's defiance of the UN and the legal dispute over the mandate would continue up until negotiations for national independence in the late 1980s.

²² André du Pisani, 2010, "State and Society under South African Rule", in *State, Society and Democracy: A Reader in Namibian Politics*, ed. Christiaan Keulder (Windhoek: Macmillan Education): 58.

²³ du Pisani, 2010, "State and Society under South African Rule": 60.

²⁴ *Ibid*: 62.

²⁵ *Ibid*: 61.

The early 1960s saw the formal formations of many black political parties and organisations. The formation of the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC) in 1958 by Namibian workers in Cape Town was an important development in the politics of resistance. As a labour movement the OPC sought to improve the working and living conditions of migrant workers, but also "anticipated being part of a broad congress movement in Namibia".²⁶ In 1959, the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) was formed in Windhoek, with Sam Nujoma as the elected President. Like the OPC, the OPO "primarily concerned itself with the position and welfare of contract workers from the North, [but] it included in its programme the attainment of national independence".²⁷ Thus in 1960, when it "reconstituted itself as SWAPO – the South West African People's Organisation – it was able to broaden its membership and appeal".²⁸ It is important to note that SWAPO evolved from the OPO, and was not born out of thin air (as the historical narrative presented in the Independence Memorial Museum suggests) as an all-inclusive liberation movement. 1959 also saw the formation of the South West African National Union (SWANU), a year before SWAPO, whose membership was mainly constituted of Herero people and was closely linked politically to the OPO and the Herero Chief's Council. SWANU was to organise the mass protest of the removal of residents from the Old Location to Katutura in Windhoek in December 1959, where 11 protesters were killed by South African police forces.

For SWAPO and SWANU, similar "political objectives and symbolic appeal culminated in personal and organisational rivalry, which was deepened when the Liberation Committee of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) – in 1962 – accorded recognition to SWAPO as a more 'authentic' movement, when the latter mounted the armed struggle".²⁹ The 1960s would see many other political parties form, "most of them with either explicit or implicit ethnic or community preferences".³⁰ However, political organisations were not the only forms of resistance taking place; among civil society, "religious societies, Churches, educational and cultural associations, students and organised labour" were contributing to the cause of the struggle.³¹ For the purposes of this study, it is important to take note of

²⁶ Condensed from du Pisani, 2010, "State and Society under South African Rule": 62.

²⁷ du Pisani, 2010, "State and Society under South African Rule": 63.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*: 64.

³¹ *Ibid.*

the existence of multiple and diverse political organisations being formed in this period, and the contributions of other areas of society. From the 1960s, SWAPO leadership began going into exile all over the world, and many Namibians followed to live in camps as refugees or as to train as guerrilla soldiers in preparation for the armed struggle. Within these camps, over three decades and located at various times in Tanzania, Angola and Zambia, “SWAPO was responsible for the welfare of roughly 60,000 Namibians”.³² As will be addressed in chapter 3, it was in exile that SWAPO committed gross human rights violations against cadres accused of working with South African forces, in what has come to be known as the ‘spy drama’.

Lastly, before the era André du Pisani refers to as ‘Controlled Change’, 1971-1989, the implementation of the Odendaal Commission’s Report of 1964 marked a serious development in the politics of domestic resistance and international outcry. The report sought to create ten “homelands” for black ethnic groups, seeking ““self-determination without ‘group domination’”.³³ The UN and the General Assembly condemned and protested the Odendaal Commission’s Report. SWAPO and SWANU rejected the proposed “policy of ethnic fragmentation as a continuation of colonialism”, and for the former it justified the perusal and intensification of the armed struggle.³⁴ In October 1966, the UN General Assembly revoked the mandate declaring the UN responsible for the territory of South West Africa, yet South African administration and occupation continued. However, with the Advisory Opinion of 1971, where the International Court of Justice confirmed the revocation of the mandate, the ball was set in motion, providing the “backdrop to the ‘politics of controlled change’, in terms of which South Africa – agonisingly slowly – came to the realisation that Namibia would become an independent state sometime in the future”.³⁵

³² Christian Williams, 2009, “Exile History: An Ethnography of the SWAPO Camps and the Namibian Nation” (PhD diss., University of Michigan): vii.

³³ du Pisani, 2010, “State and Society under South African Rule”: 66.

³⁴ *Ibid*: 67.

³⁵ *Ibid*: 68.

Under the auspices of the UN, there was a process described by Henning Melber as “controlled change”, which “finally resulted in changed control”.³⁶ While the SWAPO armed struggle, begun in the mid-1960s, was a crucial factor in the progression towards independence, Henning Melber asserts that “Namibian independence was [just] as much the result of a negotiated settlement”.³⁷ When SWANU elected not to wage an armed struggle, Christopher Saunders surmised that they could “never have posed any effective challenge” to SWAPO.³⁸ Nevertheless, SWAPO campaigned to be recognised as the “sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people” and succeeded in 1976 when the United Nations General Assembly conferred the recognition in Resolution 31/146.³⁹ In conversation with an anonymous informant, it was said that at the time this was celebrated personally as a great victory for the struggle, but in retrospect set the tone for the authoritarian nature Swapo would develop post-independence. In the negotiations, the resolution would “come to suggest that SWAPO did not believe in the multiparty democracy it claimed it wanted to see installed in Namibia... the doctrine can be blamed for buttressing the authoritarian tendencies seen in the ruling party since independence”.⁴⁰

In 1978, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 435, calling for a ceasefire and UN supervised democratic elections. The United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) was created and worked in Namibia from April 1989 to March 1990, to oversee the peace process and free elections. South Africa reluctantly accepted the UN’s interventions, but not without skirmishes. In 1989, on the official implementation date of Resolution 435, more 300 SWAPO combatants were killed by South African forces at Ondeshifiilwa.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the peace process continued under UNTAG, and the first parliamentary elections were held in November 1989. Henning Melber argues that after SWAPO reconstituted itself as a political party, the election participants “were not operating from a basis of equal opportunity”; South African allies had much support, while SWAPO “had the privilege of being

³⁶ Henning Melber, 2003, “Limits to Liberation: An Introduction to Namibia’s Postcolonial Political Culture”, in *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture Since Independence*, ed. Henning Melber (Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet): 13.

³⁷ Melber, 2003, “Limits to Liberation”: 14.

³⁸ Christopher Saunders, 2003, “Liberation and Democracy: A Critical Reading of Sam Nujoma’s ‘Autobiography’”, in *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture Since Independence*, ed. Henning Melber (Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet): 94.

³⁹ Saunders, 2003, “Liberation and Democracy”: 94.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 93.

the only recognised representative of the Namibian people”.⁴² It would seem that the non-aligned parties never stood a chance in this regard.

Swapo gained 57 percent of the votes in the first election for the constituent assembly; the majority of these votes came from the north while in the south “two-thirds of the vote went to parties other than SWAPO”.⁴³ Swapo’s biggest opposition, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), a coalition of twelve smaller parties, received the majority of their votes from the Herero and Nama communities, and whites who disagreed with apartheid policy. Another factor in non-Swapo votes was the “detainee issue”; people “feared it would not be able to abandon its heavy-handed and intolerant behaviour of the past, particularly the torture and killing of SWAPO members suspected of being South African spies in external SWAPO camps”.⁴⁴ Not receiving the two-thirds majority needed to adopt the constitutional document, the parties were forced to compromise and negotiate. The adoption of this liberal and democratic constitution brought the Republic of Namibia to formal independence on the 21st of March 1990. Nevertheless, as a result of the negotiated settlement, “the structural legacy of settler colonialism remained alive”; the transformation of land and property rights were never on the table.⁴⁵

Post-independence there has been a growing critical evaluation of Swapo’s questionable commitment to democratic and human rights values. Political analysts such as Henning Melber see the proliferation of an autocratic and violent political culture during the liberation struggle, continued unchecked into independence as a ‘democratic authoritarianism’ with little tolerance for opposition or dissent; the ‘limits to liberation’ as Melber calls it. As time has marched on, Swapo elite and leadership with struggle credentials have personally prospered while the country suffers one of the highest GINI coefficients in the world (a marker of income inequality), high unemployment rates and struggling healthcare and education systems. It is in this climate that one questions the urge to open an Independence Memorial Museum in 2014. While unable to provide a verifiable answer to this question from the source, it is my contention that it is only in placing the new museum in the discourse of Swapo political culture pre and

⁴² Melber, 2003 “Limits to Liberation”: 15.

⁴³ Linda Freeman, 1991, “The Contradictions of Independence: Namibia in Transition”, *International Journal* 46(4): 692.

⁴⁴ Freeman, 1991, “The Contradictions of Independence”: 693.

⁴⁵ Melber, 2003, “Limits to Liberation”: 13.

post-independence, that the choice made to construct it, and what has been included in and excluded from it, can begin to be understood.

Therefore, the research question this thesis seeks to interrogate why the Namibian state would commission and construct the Independence Memorial Museum, eighteen years into independence and at huge cost. Central to answering this question is an analysis of the museum itself and the version of history it presents. Importantly, when referring to the state in the context of Namibia, one is simultaneously referring to the South West African People's Organisation (Swapo), a political entity that blurs the lines between liberation movement, political party, government and state. Political hegemony has been ensured since Swapo has not only "dominated every post-independence local, regional and national election, but has also maintained a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly since 1994", giving a single party full control of the constitution.⁴⁶ Thus, having been sanctioned by a Swapo government, the memorial museum is perhaps unsurprisingly Swapo-orientated. However, what is interesting, and what calls for further investigation, is the way in which the Independence Memorial Museum fits into a larger and longer pattern of memorialisation by the Namibian government since 1990. Furthermore, what has been memorialised and how it has been memorialised will be shown to be in line with what will be referred to here as the Swapo 'master narrative' of liberation history, a term borrowed from Heike Becker.⁴⁷ This master narrative refers to the specific aspects of Namibian history that have been acknowledged, sanctioned and included in public spaces and official discourse by Swapo and the state. This study will be the first to analyse the Independence Memorial Museum and its content in relation to this master narrative. The Independence Memorial Museum tells a history of what has come to be known as 'the struggle', or the fight for independence, sovereignty and self-determination. The master narrative of this history, constructed and maintained by Swapo, promotes and centralises itself; excluding both non-Swapo contributions to the struggle and the events that showcase Swapo as any less than the heroic liberators of history. Certainly, a struggle history cannot be written without Swapo.

⁴⁶ Zuern, 2012, "Memorial Politics": 496.

⁴⁷ See Heike Becker, 2011, "Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana: Memory, Culture and Nationalism in Namibia, 1990-2010", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 81(4).

However, a history only concerning Swapo is at best only partial, as the mobilisation for national independence begins long before the formation of SWAPO in 1960.

Methodology

As a qualitative study of a political and historical nature, this dissertation is based on literature research and fieldwork conducted at the Independence Memorial Museum. From July 2016 to December 2017, five visits were made to the museums. I photographed the museum on three of these visits, to use in the elucidation of the observations and critical analyses presented in this study. All the photographs showcased here were taken by the author. Time was spent in both the museum and its surrounds, and visits were made to other relevant sites of memorialisation in Namibia such as Heroes' Acre in Windhoek and the Swakopmund Memorial Cemetery. The Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg was visited to gain a point of reference for a similar museum in similar historical and political context, which aided in thinking through how the Independence Memorial Museum could have been different.

At various points in this research, online newspaper articles were referenced for information on the museum not available elsewhere. Opinion pieces and letters to the editor from *The Namibian* were used to showcase differing examples of public opinion on issues related to the museum. This was not to pass judgement on the universality or objectivity of these opinions, but rather to acknowledge their existence in the media as a small segment of the public voice. This data was collected using *The Namibian* archival resource available online, by searching key words such as 'Independence Memorial Museum' and 'Reiterdenkmal' through the years 2008-2013. At the conference for 'Gender, Symbolic Reparation and the Arts' held in Cape Town in early February 2018, I was able to consult with Esther Muinjangu, the chairperson of the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation. Her insights provided new lines of analysis and helped to reinforce my own interpretation of the representation of the genocide within the Independence Memorial Museum and deductions as to why the genocide was dealt with in this way.

The analysis conducted in this study features two distinct but interconnected parts. The first, based mainly on literature research, involved defining and mapping out the Swapo master narrative. While all the elements of the master narrative had been theorized by scholars, historians and political analysts in

part, all of the various elements had never been shown to be interconnected as one holistic narrative produced and motivated by the same elements of Swapo's particular post-independence political culture. The second part was to analyse the Independence Memorial Museum and its content in relation to the Swapo master narrative. It is argued that this is necessary for understanding the choices made in the museum, the inclusions and exclusions, the symbolism within and North Korean style of the latest addition to the Namibian memorial landscape.

The literature reviewed in this study is an attempt to map current conversations about memorialisation mostly from within the field of transitional justice. Discussing memorialisation through the theoretical framework of transitional justice is useful as it is a field of scholarship where memorialisation, its politics and its relative value have been heavily debated. In the Namibian context, the lens of transitional justice is an interesting entry point, given the Swapo government's particular conception of reconciliation that has avoided official or formal transitional justice processes since the dawn of independence. As this research is concerned with the politics of memorialisation and memory, a choice has been made to anchor it within literature offering critical perspectives on memorialisation, as opposed to other areas such as museum studies or heritage studies, which would offer different but equally relevant and interesting perspectives and new lines of analysis. This research is less interested in what constitutes a museum as it is with memory politics and the politicization of memorialisation. The reluctance to frame this research within heritage studies stems from the notion that this museum is a North Korean one, Namibian in content only.⁴⁸ Had Namibian art and artists been used in the design and content of the museum, or if there had been inclusion of the voices, perspectives and experiences of everyday Namibians in the exhibitions, it would be easier to view the museum as an act of heritage.

Transitional justice is a multidisciplinary and holistic field of justice applied to societies in transition, such as after a civil war, genocide or dictatorship. Transitional justice is a "response to systematic or widespread violations of human rights. It seeks recognition for victims and promotion of possibilities

⁴⁸ Meghan Kirkwood, 2011, "Postcolonial Architecture Through North Korean Modes: Namibian Commissions of the Mansudae Overseas Project" (Masters diss., University of Kansas): 9.

for peace, reconciliation and democracy”.⁴⁹ It incorporates but is not limited to international law, international and domestic criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations programmes and security sector reform. As a field, transitional justice involves states and governments, international bodies such as the UN and the International Criminal Court (ICC), scholarship, domestic legal systems, NGOs and civil society activities. Political, moral and theoretical issues within the field are constantly being debated. Given the different geographical and cultural contexts, what transitional justice processes look like can differ from country to country. Likewise, the ‘objectives’ of transitional justice (justice, peace, reconciliation, democracy) have not always been met without compromise or even held to with consensus. Many hold that the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) compromised justice for the sake of reconciliation.⁵⁰ It is also important to note that transitional justice, like any other human process, can be affected by biases, prejudices and hegemonic ideologies. While transitional justice has practical possibilities it is important to recognize that it can be compromised in these ways, as well as by the constraint of unwilling, corrupt or authoritarian states and leadership.

Reading the Independence Memorial Museum

As a site of memorialisation, taking the past and inscribing it physically in the present, the Independence Memorial Museum presents a specific narrative of the achievement of Independence in Namibia that I argue can be read by the onlooker. It is argued here that the Independence Memorial Museum is exemplary of what has been understood as a Swapo master narrative of liberation.⁵¹ As such, what is attempted by the Memorial Museum is a key aspect of Swapo political culture and unofficial policy: consolidation of post-independence political hegemony via backward-looking legitimization of the party

⁴⁹ “What is Transitional Justice”, 2009, International Center for Transitional Justice, accessed September 15, 2017, <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Global-Transitional-Justice-2009-English.pdf>.

⁵⁰ For the continued relevance of this debate, see Sisonke Msimang, 2014, “A look back: Limpho Hani, Clive Derby-Lewis and the power of refusing to forgive”, *Daily Maverick*, June 11, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2014-06-11-limpho-hani-clive-derby-lewis-and-the-power-of-refusing-to-forgive/#.WmfM6aiWa00>; Colin Bundy, 2000, “The Beast of the Past: History and the TRC”, in *After the TRC, Reflections on truth and reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Wilmot James and Linda Van de Vijver (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers); Deborah Posel, 2002, “The TRC Report: What Kind of History? What Kind of Truth?”, in *Commissioning the Past, Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, ed. Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson (Johannesburg: Wits University Press).

⁵¹ The term ‘master narrative’ was first utilized in the Namibian context of memorialisation by social and cultural anthropologist Heike Becker. See Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”: 520.

as the sole and benevolent liberator of the Namibian nation. Through the use of North Korean modes of memorialisation, as Meghan Kirkwood effectively argues, Swapo attempts to “emulate the authority, cohesiveness and directed nature of a visual culture specific to Pyongyang”.⁵² While similar to the socialist realist art of the Soviet Union, Kirkwood draws on Jane Portal to explain that the term ‘socialist realist’ would be misleading as the North Korean style represents a “curious mixture of influences from Western monuments, transferred through Socialist Realist Soviet and Chinese works to a hybrid North Korean monumentalism”.⁵³ Thus, the motivation for employing Mansudae lies in the desire of Swapo leadership to “assert their authority, modernity and secure their legitimacy”, as has been done in North Korea.⁵⁴ The North Korean design of the museum is thus key to being able to critically analyse the intentionality and symbolic design of the museum and the choices made within it.

The research presented in this study is an interrogation of how and why the Independence Memorial Museum presents a particular version of history. This version is not only favourable to the Swapo political party who commissioned the museum, but exclusive to Swapo actors and events of the past. The exclusion of events, actors and narratives are not limited to those that reflect badly on Swapo, but even those that detract from the construction of Swapo as the single liberator of the Namibian people. The Independence Memorial Museum, dedicated to the history of the liberation struggle, thus presents a subjective and selective version of that history and continues to claim and present it as universally representative of Namibian liberation. While any form of recollection of the past is necessarily subjective, the point of contention here is the way in which Swapo has deliberately constructed and used history for political opportunism, legitimising and bolstering support for the party which continues to rule Namibia as essentially a single party state. The Independence Memorial Museum is not the first example of the Swapo master narrative of history, but rather falls into a longer pattern of how history has been appropriated and manipulated to present the liberation movement cum political party in the most favourable light. As the years have progressed since the achievement of independence in 1990, there has been increasing disillusionment with the party as ‘by the people, for the people’. Historical

⁵² Kirkwood, 2011, “Postcolonial Architecture Through North Korean Modes”: iii.

⁵³ Jane Portal in Kirkwood, 2011, “Postcolonial Architecture Through North Korean Modes”: 3.

⁵⁴ Kirkwood, 2011, “Postcolonial Architecture Through North Korean Modes”: 9.

narratives which problematise Swapo's version of liberation history, such as the early resistance of the Herero and Nama people, the 'spy drama', the Lubango dungeons, and the fight for reparations for the genocide of 1904-08, are kept alive by those who continue to challenge Swapo to account for and investigate the crimes of the past. It is in their exclusion that the harms are compounded and reconstituted. Therefore, this study seeks to show how the Independence Memorial Museum is an act of consolidation of the Swapo master narrative of liberation history, motivated by the need to remind the Namibian people that it was Swapo alone who liberated them.

Critical Perspectives on Memory and Memorialisation

Transitional justice, or lack thereof, is a key entry point to understanding post-independence Namibia. Having achieved independence in 1990, after enduring German colonialism, a genocide, South African occupation, the implementation of an apartheid state, an armed struggle and the accompanying acute human rights violations, Namibia can be recognized as a country where transitional justice would have been applicable. In neighbouring South Africa, one outcome of the negotiated settlement was the transitional justice process of a truth commission. The TRC was established with the “objective of promoting national unity and reconciliation” in the new democracy.⁵⁵ It sought to accomplish this by getting at the ‘truth’ of what happened during the apartheid era by establishing “as comprehensive an account as possible of gross human rights abuses over a period of thirty-four years”.⁵⁶ The TRC was South Africa’s attempt at reconciliation through truth, in the belief that in the receiving and disseminating of a record of the truth, people would be able to heal and move forward.

Comparatively, Namibia underwent no official transitional justice processes. This not only concerned the period of South African occupation, but German colonialism and the Nama and Herero genocide too. Processes for truth seeking and reparation were never held, although land reform and amnesty were critical issues for the negotiated independence of 1990. In Namibia, blanket amnesty for politically motivated crimes was applied to both sides, the South African army and the liberation movement, and unlike South Africa amnesty was not predicated on truth telling. It should be noted that in 1990, transitional justice was a fledgling field and what the Namibian state did after the transition to independence was the norm, what occurred in South Africa four years later was considered novel for the time. However, the continuation of the refusal to investigate accusations of human rights violations or even engage in these conversations reflects the unwillingness of the Swapo state to partake in established transitional justice processes, even as it has largely come to be an expected response to

⁵⁵ Bundy, 2000, “The Beast of the Past: History and the TRC”: 16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*: 16.

periods of conflict where gross human rights abuses took place.⁵⁷ The South African TRC even offered Namibia the opportunity to participate, as many crimes of the South African regime had been committed in Namibia. When the TRC requested to hold hearings in Namibia, government leadership refused, citing that the hearings “will not contribute to our own efforts to bring about genuine reconciliation and to continue devising ways and means of healing wounds”.⁵⁸ In the Swapo press release from 1999, the title “It is either reconciliation or the opening of old wounds” indicates the belief that reconciliation cannot be achieved by delving into the past.⁵⁹ The Namibian’s government’s specific strategy of reconciliation which privileged the need to ‘move on’ and forget the past will be discussed in the next chapter, but it suffices to note here that formal transitional justice processes were not encouraged or permitted on Namibian soil.

Transitional justice theory posits memorialisation as a form of reparation, holding the ability to in some way repair the harms of the past, although the actual value of this is contested, as well as the fact that memorialisation can be utilized for other objectives outside of the purview of transitional justice.⁶⁰ It should be noted that the Independence Memorial Museum could perhaps be better understood through the lens of nation building and nationalism, and this will be expanded upon to come. However, given the history of the land on which the Independence Memorial Museum was built, and the motion introduced in parliament in 2011 to rename the museum ‘The Genocide Remembrance Centre’, a discussion of memorialisation as a form of symbolic reparation is necessary.⁶¹ Tabled by SWANU president and Herero leader Usutuaije Maamberua, the motion is testament to the fact that at least one affected group saw the museum as an opportunity for symbolic reparation. As will be shown, the failure

⁵⁷ After the political violence surrounding the 2007 elections in Kenya, a truth commission was set up to investigate not just what occurred in 2007, but political violence dating back to 1963. Thus, there is precedence for states using transitional justice processes retrospectively, long after the period of violations took place.

⁵⁸ The original article from *The Namibian* could not be accessed, this quote was taken from Michelle Parleviet, 2000, “Truth Commissions in Africa: the Non-Case of Namibia and the Emerging Case of Sierra Leone”, *International Law FORUM* 2: 104.

⁵⁹ Taken from Parleviet, 2000, “Truth Commissions in Africa: the Non-Case of Namibia and the Emerging Case of Sierra Leone”: 104.

⁶⁰ See Kris Brown, 2013, “Commemoration as Symbolic Reparation: New Narratives or Spaces of Conflict?”, *Human Rights Review* 14; Brandon Hamber, Lis Ševčenko and Ereshnee Naidu, 2010, “Utopian Dreams or Practical Possibilities? The Challenges of Evaluating the Impact of Memorialization in Societies in Transition”, *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4.

⁶¹ Ellie Hamrick and Haley Duschinski, 2017, “Enduring injustice: Memory politics and Namibia’s genocide reparations movement”, *Memory Studies*: 2.

to address the genocide in the Swapo master narrative corresponds with the treatment of the genocide in the museum and its surrounds, despite the apparent urging of the affected communities. In a survey of victims of violence conducted by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, it was found that “memorialization initiatives were the second most important form of state reparation after financial compensation”.⁶² In the Namibian context, the motion to rename the museum attests to the value ascribed by the affected community to symbolic reparation. As such, a discussion of symbolic reparation and its potential cathartic effects and moral imperatives will follow.

Reparations are generally conceived of as a victim-centric form of justice in the transitional justice community, seeking to “recognize and address the harms suffered and acknowledge wrongdoing” for victims of gross human rights violations.⁶³ Under the UN’s ‘Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law’ (2005), states “are obliged to prevent violations; to investigate any violations which do occur and, where appropriate, take action against the violators in accordance with domestic and international law; to provide victims with equal and effective access to justice; and to provide appropriate remedies to victims; and to provide for or facilitate reparation to victims”.⁶⁴ Although Namibia is a member state of the UN, this resolution while asserting a moral principle is ultimately non-binding. Therefore the Namibian state is not legally obliged to facilitate reparation programmes.

The reparation forms prescribed by the Basic Principles include “restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition”.⁶⁵ Memorialisation can be considered a form of symbolic reparation, offering the above forms in a symbolic way, such as with the

⁶² Sebastian Brett, Louis Bickford, Liz Ševčenko and Marcela Rios, 2007, “Memorialisation and Democracy: State Policy and Civic Action” (ICTJ), https://ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Global-Memorialization-Democracy-2007-English_0.pdf: 2.

⁶³ “Reparations”, International Center for Transitional Justice, accessed September 15, 2017, <https://www.ictj.org/our-work/transitional-justice-issues/reparations>.

⁶⁴ Stephen Pete and Max du Plessis, 2007, “Reparations for Gross Violations of Human Rights in Context”, in *Repairing the Past? International Perspectives on Reparations for Gross Human Rights Abuses* (Antwerpen - Oxford: Intersentia): 13.

⁶⁵ Ereshnee Naidu, 2012 -2013, “Symbolic Reparations and Reconciliation: Lessons from South Africa”, *Buffalo Human Rights Law Review* 19: 252.

acknowledgement that an act of memorialisation can confer. Other examples of symbolic reparation include apology and even truth-seeking processes. Indeed, if we consider that every culture in the world has some form of death rites, from rituals to tombstones, memorialisation after trauma or loss is arguably a basic human instinct. Brandon Hamber, Lis Ševčenko and Ereshnee Naidu note that often, and across “vastly different contexts, citizens in societies emerging from conflict have demanded memorialisation as necessary to moving forward”.⁶⁶ Indeed, a lack of memorialisation in any form can constitute the continuation of the injustice. While the intentionality behind the Independence Memorial Museum was arguably not to be a form of symbolic reparation, given the Namibian leadership’s aforementioned approach to the past, the museum’s content concerning a violent past and especially its siting on the land that was once a concentration camp, it certainly begs the question of why it was not conceived of as a move towards symbolic reparation and thus what motivated it instead.

Memorialisation and Memory

Memorialisation generally refers to the action of preserving memory in some form. In the context of transitional justice, it usually refers to the “process of creating public memorials”.⁶⁷ Public memorials offer visual, public and official acknowledgement of an event or person, but they also offer a particular and subjective interpretation. Sebastian Brett, Louis Bickford, Liz Ševčenko and Marcela Rios define them as “physical representations or commemorative activities that concern events in the past and are located in public spaces. They are designed to evoke a specific reaction or set of reactions, including public acknowledgement of the event or people represented; personal reflections or mourning; pride, anger, or sadness about something that has happened; or learning or curiosity about periods in the past”.⁶⁸ As such, they are designed and imbued with meaning, which can be multifaceted. While they can be organised and implemented privately, given that they occupy public space and usually require resources, memorialisation typically occurs on a national level under the auspices of the state. Museums, statues, public parks, street names and public holidays can all be forms of memorialisation, when concerning or dedicated to events or people in the past. As such, these products of memorialisation

⁶⁶ Hamber et al, 2010, “Utopian Dreams or Practical Possibilities?”: 397.

⁶⁷ Brett et al, 2007, “Memorialisation and Democracy”: 1.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

offer reminders, representations or interpretations of the past and thus share theoretical ground with current critical debates in the fields of history and memory studies. The discussion to come, regarding the creation and motivation behind the Swapo master narrative of liberation history and how this has impacted state-led memorialisation, should be foregrounded with an exploration of key concepts in the field of memory.

There exist various functions and forms of history and memory; autobiographical memory, historical memory, historical truth, traumatic memory, official history, counter memory and social or collective memory.⁶⁹ There is diverging opinion about where one category begins and another ends, how and whether they inform one another, their causes and their consequences. While this debate cannot be expanded upon fully within the purview of this research, it will suffice to identify and define the concepts of official history, counter memory and collective memory in order to develop an analysis of the politics of memory within the Independence Memorial Museum. Official history is that which is sponsored and endorsed by the state: it can be found within public acts of memorialisation, within school curricula and in what is referred to by the political elite in public addresses and the media. Similar is the concept of public history, “the story that is promoted by the government and is disseminated through monuments, museums and school curricula”, which is understood by Tycho van der Hoog as a function and consequence of a violent political culture in a comparative analysis of North Korean monuments in Namibia and Zimbabwe.⁷⁰ The Swapo master narrative of liberation history is the particular form of official history in Namibia. In post-apartheid South Africa, Gary Baines explores the politics of public history and premises this with the statement that the “question of whose version of history gets disseminated and institutionalized is a political one”.⁷¹ Those in power, with political, economic and social power, have the resources and institutional support to write official history. Baines uses former president Thabo Mbeki’s “People’s History” Project as an example of constructing official history, one

⁶⁹ See Olick and Robbins, 1998, “Social Memory Studies”.

⁷⁰ Tycho van der Hoog, 2017, “North Korean monuments in southern Africa: Legitimizing party rule through National Heroes’ Acres in Zimbabwe and Namibia” (Masters diss., Leiden University): 47.

⁷¹ Gary Baines, 2007, “The politics of public history in post-apartheid South Africa”, in *History Making and Present Day Politics: The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa*, ed. Hans Erik Stolten (Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet): 167.

which makes “the liberation struggle the master narrative of our national history”.⁷² Thus, the concept of official history or even a master narrative is not unique to the Namibian context. However, the monopoly of political power held by Swapo means that the official history put forward by the state is completely monolithic and as such is understood as a Swapo master narrative of liberation history, with the concept of the nation intrinsically tied to liberation.

Jeffery Olick and Joyce Robbins refer to counter memory as “memories that differ from, and often challenge, dominant discourses”, or memories that have been “left out” of official histories.⁷³ Counter memory is thus in a symbiotic relationship with official history, as there cannot be one without the other. In Namibia, various groups, as well as individual activists, in keeping their memories alive, commemorating them, and calling for recognition or justice, are challenging official history through counter memory, as will be explored in the next chapter.⁷⁴ Collective memory, on the other hand, is more concerned with the use of memory in the creation, definition and maintenance of social groups. Although definitions are contested and can be changing given different contextual uses, collective memory can generally be understood as the memories and pasts that are drawn upon in creating and maintaining group identity. Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan define collective memory as “narratives of past experience constituted by and on behalf of specific groups within which they find meaningful forms of identification that may empower”.⁷⁵ To conceptualise of the nation as a group identity is to consider how it is socially constructed and uses collective memory to define and sustain itself. The seminal text on collective memory and nationalism is Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983). Here Anderson defines a nation as an imagined community, because despite consisting of a large and differentiated group of people (differentiated by race, class, gender, age, ethnicity), they share

⁷² Gary Baines, 2007, “The politics of public history in post-apartheid South Africa”: 176.

⁷³ Olick and Robbins, 1998, “Social Memory Studies”: 126.

⁷⁴ For some examples of counter memory culture alive in Namibia, see Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”; Reinhart Kössler, 2007, “Facing a Fragmented Past: Memory, Culture and Politics in Namibia”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33(2); Zuern, 2012, “Memorial Politics”; Hamrick and Duschinski, 2017, “Enduring injustice”; John Saul and Colin Leys, 2003, “Truth, Reconciliation and Amnesia: The “Ex-Detainees” Fight for Justice”, in *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture Since Independence*, ed. Henning Melber (Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet).

⁷⁵ Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan, 2012, “Collective memory: theory and politics”, *Social Semiotics* 22(2): 143.

a “deep and horizontal comradeship” through the abstract concept of being a part of the nation.⁷⁶ Again, collective memory is inherently political as it is those with power who have the power to define the collective. Weedon and Jordan explain that it is always “a social product... shaped by specific interests and power relations, and the constitution of memory is above all a terrain of cultural politics”.⁷⁷ The basis of group identity is defining who is in and who is out of the group, and this is often done through the use of collective memory. Kössler argues that the construction of a national identity in Namibia was a “decisive framing of the transition process” to independence.⁷⁸ The transition prompted the need to define what the country would transition from and what it would transition into. Exclusion, or in Kössler’s argument ‘amnesia’ for particular historical events and their actors, was central to the way in which Swapo constructed a national identity. As will be shown in the next chapter, the construction of a national identity was both a cause and effect of the Swapo master narrative which sought to conflate Swapo with the nation, united by Swapo despite racial, ethnic or historical difference, a homogenous ‘One Namibia, One Nation’ (as the Swapo slogan goes).

Key Case Studies in Memorialisation

It is now pertinent to expand upon how memorialisation works, how it can hold promise for societies in transition and help to achieve transitional justice goals, and how it can also hold risk. For victims of gross human rights abuses, the acknowledgement that memorialisation provides can have several palliative effects. Kris Brown, a transitional justice scholar, also notes the “liberating function” of memorialisation (and symbolic reparations more generally) which allows victims to break their (often self-imposed) silence, “unburden themselves” and have their stories be more readily understood by society at large.⁷⁹ Brown also points to ‘memory as warning’, where a society can learn lessons from what has happened in the past. Brown notes that establishing a collective memory of an event or period of gross violation of human rights can act as a deterrent, ensuring that we “learn from the horrors of the

⁷⁶ Benedict Anderson, 1983, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso): 7.

⁷⁷ Weedon and Jordan, 2012, “Collective memory”: 144.

⁷⁸ Reinhart Kössler, 2015, “Two modes of amnesia: complexity in postcolonial Namibia”, *Acta Academia* 47(1): 139.

⁷⁹ Brown, 2013, “Commemoration as Symbolic Reparation”: 277.

past so as to avoid repeating them”.⁸⁰ Hamber, Ševčenko and Naidu conducted a study on the impact of three International Coalition of Sites of Conscience on youth groups attending them. Their findings showed visiting the sites helped with “changing opinions, raising awareness, improving relationships, encouraging civic engagement and increasing emotional understanding of the human consequence of atrocity”.⁸¹ However, this impact is necessarily mediated by “careful design, innovative programming and evaluation, as well as through linking such processes to other wider mechanisms”.⁸² Although not designed with the intentionality of symbolic reparation under the auspices of transitional justice, we can nevertheless think through some of these positive outcomes as the Independence Memorial Museum memorialises a violent past. However, this is limited by the exclusive nature of what is included in the museum and how the human rights violations perpetrated by Swapo itself are not addressed within the museum, thus offering no symbolic recompense to those victims.

There are also arguments that warn against the emphasis on the will to remember. David Rieff questions “what if collective historical memory, as it is actually employed by communities and nations, has led far too often to war rather than peace, to rancour and resentment rather than reconciliation, and the determination to exact revenge for injuries both real and imagined?”⁸³ This issue is explored by Brown too, who discusses how the symbolically loaded nature of commemorating a violent past means that it can become a source of contention or violence for members of societies who were once enemies. Rieff points to historical political moments where the continued preservation of memory has only caused more harm, using case studies from the world over, one such example is the continued use of the memory of 9/11 to justify the ‘war on terror’, in which many more innocent civilians have been killed as compared with the original event, albeit outside of the United States. Rieff premises that he is “not prescribing moral amnesia here... Nor am I arguing against the determination for a group to memorialise it dead or demand acknowledgement of its suffering”.⁸⁴ Yet after this has been achieved,

⁸⁰ Brown, 2013, “Commemoration as Symbolic Reparation”: 276.

⁸¹ Hamber et al, “Utopian Dreams or Practical Possibilities?”: 397.

⁸² *Ibid*: 400.

⁸³ David Rieff, 2016, “The cult of memory: when history does more harm than good”, *The Guardian*, March 2, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/mar/02/cult-of-memory-when-history-does-more-harm-than-good>.

⁸⁴ Rieff, 2016, “The cult of memory”.

perhaps it would serve better the goals of peace and justice to let the past lie. Rieff writes, “it is less a question of ‘forgetfulness now’ as of the realisation that at some point in the future, whether that moment comes relatively quickly or is deferred, the victories, defeats, wounds and grudges being commemorated would be better let go”.⁸⁵ The premise, however, is a sticking point in the Namibian context, where due acknowledgement and memorialisation for the history that falls outside of the Swapo master narrative remains unattained. Yet his argument also corroborates the converse side of memory politics in Namibia, where Swapo continues to legitimise itself as the political party for the people using the memory of the liberation war, and the harms occasioned by this.

What remains clear is that if there are to be positive outcomes of memorialisation, they are entirely dependent on the context in which it is used. What is memorialised, by whom and for what reasons are political questions, as they are decided by those with or in power. Hamber, Ševčenko and Naidu also note that memorialisation can be “used as a political resource to maintain control or legitimize positions. Sites can become more about glorification than memorialisation”.⁸⁶ The tension between memorialisation of the past and glorification of the past is a defining feature of the discussions around the Swapo master narrative of liberation history to come, especially when considering the North Korean modes through which Swapo’s memorialisation ventures in the capital have been conducted. As Meghan Kirkwood argues, the socialist realist North Korean style of memorialisation is inherently the endowment of physical and symbolic grandeur onto narratives and actors of the past.⁸⁷ Sabine Marschall, on heritage in post-independence South Africa, comments that it is “arguably an opportunistic means to fulfil the social needs of the electorate”.⁸⁸ As heritage, or the preservation of the past, “is a malleable, ambiguous concept, full of paradoxes, it lends itself to be utilized in multifarious ways, supporting sometimes contradictory political, economic, social and cultural agendas”.⁸⁹ While hesitant to conceptualise of the museum as an act of heritage, this nevertheless shows how the past is open to being manipulated to suit the specific needs of those in power.

⁸⁵ Rieff, 2016, “The cult of memory”.

⁸⁶ Hamber et al, “Utopian Dreams or Practical Possibilities?”: 418, 419.

⁸⁷ See Kirkwood, 2011, “Postcolonial Architecture Through North Korean Modes”.

⁸⁸ Sabine Marschall, 2009, “Introduction”, in *Landscape of Memory* (Brill): 1.

⁸⁹ Marschall, 2009, “Introduction”: 1.

A relevant case study of the use of memorialisation in a similar post-colonial context to Namibia is provided by Justin Pearce. In “Contesting the Past in Angolan Politics”, Pearce explores how history, memory and memorialisation have been manipulated in various ways by Angola’s ruling party, *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA). Kris Brown describes how symbolic reparations can be used “in battles over legitimacy, authority, morality and identity”, and this is exactly what Pearce has identified in Angola.⁹⁰ Moreover, Pearce argues that throughout Southern Africa, post-independence political actors use “memories of colonial and racial subjugation and of participation in liberation struggles as the raw material for the articulation of historical narratives”.⁹¹ More insidiously, he notes that this creation of an exclusive post-colonial legitimacy was a tactic “central to the hegemonic efforts of post-liberation governments even as their practices become more authoritarian, exclusivist and venal”.⁹² The acknowledgement that what has occurred in Namibia is not unique pushes the analysis forward, to consider how a specific type of memorialisation is not just the consequence of the Namibian context, but the broader indication of trends in a postcolonial political culture across southern Africa, including Namibia, Angola, Zimbabwe and to some extent South Africa. All these countries where the predominant liberation movement became the predominant (or exclusive) political party in power post-independence can be shown to have relied on the memory of fighting a liberation movement to legitimize them as dominant political parties after independence, and this is reflected in their various post-independence constructions of official history and memorialisation efforts.⁹³

Pearce describes the MPLA’s deployment of history as a “political weapon”, wielded not in a static way, but dependently on the “political demands of particular moments”.⁹⁴ The MPLA utilized “school syllabuses, the media and political education” to assert itself as the “embodiment of the Angolan Nation”.⁹⁵ This shifted over the years from emphasising its role as single-handed liberator, to the democratically elected party of choice and defender of democracy in Angola. The end of the war in

⁹⁰ Brown, 2013, “Commemoration as Symbolic Reparation”: 275.

⁹¹ Justin Pearce, 2015, “Contesting the Past in Angolan Politics”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41(1): 104.

⁹² Pearce, 2015, “Contesting the Past in Angolan Politics”: 104.

⁹³ See Melber, 2003, “Limits to Liberation”.

⁹⁴ Pearce, 2015, “Contesting the Past in Angolan Politics”: 107.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*: 108.

2002 signalled a return to the historic liberator discourse, deployed concurrently with the democracy discourse, resulting in a “politically functioning ambiguity between the MPLA’s role as a competitor in a multi-party system and its role as a state-like embodiment of the nation that sits above the party system”.⁹⁶ When considering memorialisation, there is just as much meaning to be gained from what is *not* memorialised compared to what is. Thus Pearce notes two events which consisted of MPLA violence against civilians, one in 1977 and the other in 1992, which have been completely silenced in the MPLA’s official version of history. The events derail the MPLA’s preferred narrative of itself as the people’s protector, the nation’s defender and bringer of peace and democracy. As well as this, Angola has completely “refrained from investigating wartime abuses”, with the 2002 peace agreement between the military and the main opposition party *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) conferring a blanket amnesty over past crimes on either side.⁹⁷ The use of amnesty in Namibia could sustain a comparative analysis of how amnesty bargains affect the construction of authoritative official histories for further study. In the next chapter, looking at the utilisation of amnesty and lack of investigation for political crimes in post-independence Namibia helps to explain how a singular master narrative of liberation history could be constructed by the Swapo party.

Leading on from this analysis of memorialisation in Angola, we note that memorialisation can never be objective, value-free or apolitical, simply because the powers that govern society are not. As such, in a patriarchal society we may encounter patriarchal memorialisation. In South Africa, a gendered analysis of post-apartheid memorialisation by Sabine Marschall (2009) reveals two types of exclusion. First, that women have largely been excluded from the struggle narratives within memorialisation and second, that where included, this has been done so problematically, essentialising women and confining them to representation through traditional gender roles. Marschall asserts that “the post-apartheid practices of public commemoration throughout South Africa remain overwhelmingly male-dominated”.⁹⁸ When women are included as the subjects of commemoration, it is usually collectively or abstractly, and it is

⁹⁶ Pearce, “Contesting the Past in Angolan Politics”: 109.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*: 118.

⁹⁸ Sabine Marschall, 2009, “Celebrating ‘Mothers of the Nation’: The Monument to the Women of South Africa in Pretoria”, in *Landscape of Memory* (Brill): 234.

here the absurdity of the idea of a ‘Monument to the Men of South Africa’ should be considered. Nevertheless, the ‘Monument to the Women of South Africa’ can be found in the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Installed in 2000 to memorialise the 1956 Women’s March, it also “more generally honours the contribution of women to the liberation struggle”.⁹⁹ The monument is a replication of the *imbokodo*, a traditional grinding stone, selected from an open design competition. Symbolically the stone represents two things, firstly, “its anti-heroic stance stressing the ordinariness of women to be honoured here”.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, it references the struggle song “Strike the Woman Strike the Rock”, articulating the strength and resilience of women.

The *imbokodo* appealed to the competition’s criterion for the Women’s Monument to be “conceptually and aesthetically different from the Eurocentric convention of commemorative public monuments in South Africa”.¹⁰¹ However, this laudable aim is problematised when it is noted that traditional statues continued to be utilized after this point, notably, that of Nelson Mandela commissioned in 2002. While the understated and everyday nature of the Women’s Monument was supposed to be a nuanced symbol of the ordinariness of the brave women who partook in the 1956 march, and challenge Eurocentric conventions, in reality the monument was “ridiculed in the media for its inconspicuousness and its iconographic references”.¹⁰² There was a disconnect between the meaning the memorial was trying to convey, and what people actually perceived it to be. Many saw the ‘rock’ on the floor as a snub.

Marschall argues a scepticism of the inclusive nature of the monument, given the competition briefing that the piece should “acknowledge all the women of South Africa, black, brown and white”.¹⁰³ Marschall points out that the monument implicitly only represents “women who resisted apartheid”, excluding those who did not resist and homogenising the actions of those who did.¹⁰⁴ Marschall points to arguably a more problematic element of exclusion, namely that the *imbokodo* “is a reference solely to African culture and does not do justice to the remarkable show of unity between women of all racial

⁹⁹ Marschall, 2009, “Celebrating ‘Mothers of the Nation’: The Monument to the Women of South Africa in Pretoria”: 233.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*: 242.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰² *Ibid*: 246.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*: 245.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*.

backgrounds that characterized this historical event”, asking how coloured, Asian or white women may see themselves represented in the monument.¹⁰⁵

The monument not only inspires questions of which women are represented but also of how they are represented. The *imbokodo* is ultimately a signifier of the domestic sphere and could thus be criticised for reinforcing traditional gender roles. As much as the monument celebrates those who took action by marching, it can likewise be seen as a reminder of their ‘natural’ place in the home. The monument, in ostensibly celebrating the women who marched and then more generally commemorating all the women of South Africa, therefore somewhat contradicts itself and does little to commemorate the other roles played by women in the struggle. Marschall speaks to how the very commemoration of this event in particular shows how it meets “men’s criteria of being courageous resistance fighters”, in the form of traditional political action.¹⁰⁶ Other contributions, such as “nurturing the wounded, lending moral and emotional support... or providing shelter to those on the run”, and even “those women who actively fought as MK soldiers, who led marches or spent time in prison” are ignored.¹⁰⁷ The shortcomings of this monument only further marginalises and misrepresents women in post-apartheid South Africa. Many of Marschall’s insights can be applied to the Namibian context, and in thinking through the ways in which the Independence Memorial Museum includes and excludes certain narratives, events and actors, the misrepresentation of women in patriarchal modes of memorialisation (as well as direct exclusion and invisibilisation) should be considered a form of exclusion.

In this chapter, thinking through what memorialisation is, why it occurs, and both the risks and promises it holds will foreground the analysis of memorialisation specifically in the Namibian context. Although transitional justice has not been embraced by the Namibian political machine, theorising memorialisation through the lens of transitional justice offers insights into critical debates happening in the field which have bearing on the Namibian context. In conclusion, I would draw attention to the following final thoughts. Memorialisation is not benevolent in and of itself, and it cannot be assumed

¹⁰⁵ Marschall, 2009, “Celebrating ‘Mothers of the Nation’: The Monument to the Women of South Africa in Pretoria”: 246.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*: 252.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

that memorialisation occurs in every context in good faith. Although it can be utilized as a form of symbolic reparation, seeking to acknowledge and remedy harm to victims of gross human rights violations, it can just as easily be wielded for purposes of bolstering nationalism or securing authoritarianism. The forthcoming analysis of the Independence Memorial Museum will be considered through the lens of each in trying to interpret the meaning of and motivation for this act of memorialisation. Like history and memory, memorialisation is necessarily subjective and selective, both unintentionally and sometimes intentionally. Memorialisation can be exclusive of those who are (and whose histories are) marginalised by the distribution of power in society, such as ethnic minorities or women, and those who are both. It is not immune to hegemonic ideologies, prevailing power dynamics in society and political opportunism. Memorialisation is thus political, and the politics of memorialisation are detrimental to how it is implemented and received. What is interesting in Justin Pearce's case study of Angola is the way in which the narratives writ into the MPLA's forms of memorialisation have shifted and adapted to suit changing political needs over the years. This invites a consideration of what the Independence Memorial Museum as the latest act of official memorialisation is a response to, in terms of the current political climate and culture more than twenty years after independence. In the next chapter, what has been referred to as the Swapo 'master narrative' of liberation history will be defined and the way in which it has affected official history, counter memory, collective memory and memorialisation will be interrogated.

Constructing the Swapo Master Narrative of Liberation History

The old adage that history is written by the victors exists for a particular reason. History is predominantly ‘written’ and distributed by those with the power and resources to do so. It is important to recognize that what will be discussed in the following chapter is not a phenomenon unique to Namibia or its leadership; it has occurred the world over. The connections drawn between Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa in the previous chapter constitute only a small number of examples within this discussion. Indeed, Henning Melber asserts that in particular the post-independence political culture of Namibia, encompassing the writing of the nation’s history, can be seen as something of a pattern for liberation movements reorganised as political parties throughout Southern Africa.¹⁰⁸ Scholarship on memorialisation in Namibia, specifically the official memorialisation conducted by the Swapo government, while not extremely expansive, is largely in consensus.¹⁰⁹ In particular, there is consensus about Swapo’s strategy of crafting a particular narrative of history which glorifies, legitimizes and self-serves; pointed to by many scholars and referred to in several different ways, this will be referred to in this research as the ‘Swapo master narrative of liberation history’. Mapping how and why this narrative has been constructed and maintained is important for contextualising the Independence Memorial Museum. The museum, as the latest installation to the Namibian memorial landscape, is born out of a longer tradition of Swapo memorialisation and thus needs to be contextualised in relation to the Swapo master narrative. This chapter will identify the master narrative and discuss its motivations and implications. It will interrogate the conditions under which such a master narrative could be created in Namibia. This chapter will also briefly take note of moments, movements and actors who challenge the master narrative, in the form of counter memory and activism.

Even before its construction, debates abounded in the public arena as to the intentions behind the erection of the Independence Memorial Museum, its value and necessity. Some of the public

¹⁰⁸ See Melber, 2003, “Limits to Liberation”.

¹⁰⁹ See Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”; Zuern, 2012, “Memorial Politics”; Kirkwood, 2011, “Postcolonial Architecture Through North Korean Modes”; Chandra Frank, 2012, “A Memorial or an Anti-Memorial? A Photographic Essay of the Memorial Cemetery Park in Swakopmund, Namibia”, *Counter-cultures in contemporary Africa* 8(1); van der Hoog, 2017, “North Korean monuments in Southern Africa”.

commenters were aware and fearful of what type of memorialisation the new museum would partake in, an exclusionary and glorified form of memorialisation already established by the Swapo state. Dre Ndjai, in an open letter to *The Namibian*, explicitly stated his belief that “our government is working very hard to make sure that only what happened in the Swapo era should be remembered and thus honoured.”¹¹⁰ Although not the only public sentiment expressed, it does indicate an awareness of the issues that will be discussed in this chapter. The same sentiment was expressed by scholars such as Elke Zuern, who noted that critics had “raised the concern that the museum would continue to glorify the actions of Swapo and ignore the actions of others who resisted foreign repression”.¹¹¹ As will be shown, these concerns did not present unwarranted or out of the blue. Instead, they were based on a prior knowledge of a longer tradition in Swapo memorialisation, based on the officially sanctioned historical narrative. Heike Becker refers to this as the “master narrative of national liberation”, calling it the “foundation myth of post-colonial Namibia”.¹¹² Chandra Frank in her research refers to the “dominant heritage narrative” of the post-independent state.¹¹³ Elke Zuern names it “the post-independence state narrative”, writing that “the dominant current presentation of Namibian history is a Swapo-based narrative”.¹¹⁴ Reinhart Kössler refers to an “official remembrance policy”.¹¹⁵ Henning Melber names it the “heroic narrative”.¹¹⁶

What all these authors are referring to is a strategic effort by Swapo to construct a legitimising historical narrative. It can also be understood as official or public history, that which is sanctioned and recognized in various ways by the Swapo-led government. Essentially this narrative limits the notion of ‘the struggle’ to the period of Swapo’s armed resistance, silences the earlier history of the resistance and other non-Swapo actors and organisations that contributed to the gaining of independence. The narrative also silences critiques of Swapo, and ignores Swapo’s own history of gross human rights abuses and

¹¹⁰ Dre Ndjai, 2013, “Keep the Reiterdenkmal”, *The Namibian*, October 11, <https://www.namibian.com.na/115161/archive-read/Keep-the-Reiterdenkmal-I-want-to-air-my-views>.

¹¹¹ Zuern, 2012, “Memorial Politics”: 514.

¹¹² Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”: 520.

¹¹³ Frank, 2012, “A Memorial or an Anti-Memorial?”: 2.

¹¹⁴ Zuern, 2012, “Memorial Politics”: 496, 497.

¹¹⁵ Reinhart Kössler, 2003, “Public Memory, Reconciliation and the Aftermath of War: A Preliminary Framework with Special Reference to Namibia”, in *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture Since Independence*, ed. Henning Melber (Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet): 108.

¹¹⁶ Melber, 2003, “Limits to Liberation”: 11.

gender based violence in exile. Tantamount to this particular history is Swapo's preferred notion of reconciliation, which in the literature is shown to rely on concepts of amnesty and amnesia over truth-seeking and justice for the crimes of the past.¹¹⁷ Having no formal truth seeking or transitional justice processes after the transition to independence allowed Swapo to consolidate an official, authoritative narrative that refuses to acknowledge Swapo's own crimes. The aims in constructing and maintaining this master narrative have been understood as legitimisation, consolidation of power and protection of the party. As yet, the interwoven nature of all these elements, in regards to what the narrative is, how it has been constructed and why, has not been fully addressed in the literature. Likewise, as of yet, the Independence Memorial Museum and its contents have not been critically analysed. However, mapping and linking the contributions made by others is vital for understanding the museum in the context of Swapo's long established tradition of memorialisation and commemorative narratives. Indeed, without contextualising the museum within Namibia's current and historical political culture and the patterns of public memorialisation already established by Swapo, the Independence Memorial Museum and its wider implications cannot be fully understood.

Legitimising the Liberator

Commenting more generally on what happens when liberation movements form political parties, Henning Melber notes that using "selective narratives and memories related to the war(s) of liberation they construct or invent new traditions to establish an exclusive post-colony legitimacy... The mythologizing of the liberators plays an essential role in this fabrication".¹¹⁸ This explains both how and why Swapo has constructed a master narrative of liberation history. In explaining this tendency, Melber points to the 'painful realisation' that "armed liberation struggles were not a suitable foundation for the establishment of democratic systems of government", as opposed to breaking with the past we see instead the mirroring of colonial structures and the irreversible impact of violent colonisation on the

¹¹⁷ See Godwin Komes, 2013, "Negotiating 'silent reconciliation': The long struggle for transitional justice in Namibia", *Working Papers of the Department of Anthropology and African Studies of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz* 141; Saul and Leys, 2003, "Truth, Reconciliation and Amnesia"; Kössler, 2015, "Two modes of amnesia".

¹¹⁸ Henning Melber, 2005, "Namibia's Past in the Present: Colonial Genocide and Liberation Struggle in Commemorative Narratives", *South African Historical Journal* 54: 92.

“socio-cultural and political mentalities of the Namibian people”.¹¹⁹ As such, the memory politics of the present are also telling of the current state of democracy in Namibia and a political culture that must be understood with reference to the past. In southern Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Angola and Mozambique have all to greater or lesser extents experienced liberation movements which transformed into political parties with similar authoritarian political cultures (despite formal democracy in some) and varying intolerance for political opposition.

Reinhart Kössler in “Facing a Fragmented Past” explores the importance of collective memory for nation building, and the tensions this creates when a ‘fragmented past’ means that different Namibians will have a historically unique experience of the past given ethnic and regional differences and how they were affected by the different stages of colonialism in Namibia.¹²⁰ Kössler contributes that “history does not refer to an experience that may be considered as common to all Namibian in any unproblematic way”, but that “a national history”, such as constructed by the Swapo state, is “part and parcel of nation-building that in itself is not be misconstrued simply as one progressive advance towards cohesion and integration, but rather as a protracted and more or less intense struggle and debate”.¹²¹ Thus, the use of history to create or define the nation means that a multifaceted history is constricted to a single, unified narrative where inevitably exclusion and invisibilisation takes place.

Tycho van der Hoog argues that in Namibia and Zimbabwe, “the Heroes’ Acres can be understood as potent symbols of nationalist history, used to legitimize the rule of the former liberation movements”.¹²² In his comparative analysis of monuments constructed by North Korea in the two counties, van der Hoog identifies six characteristics found in both historical discourses. They share “a binary view on history, a connection between primary and secondary resistance, a focus on masculinity and violence, the party is perceived as a family, the party is the bringer of peace and liberation and the discourse is influenced by Marxism”.¹²³ All of these dimensions have in part or whole been addressed in the literature on Namibian memorialisation or Swapo political culture, but it is important to note that

¹¹⁹ Melber, 2005, “Namibia’s Past in the Present”: 92.

¹²⁰ See Kössler, 2007, “Facing a Fragmented Past”.

¹²¹ *Ibid*: 367.

¹²² van der Hoog, 2017, “North Korean monuments in Southern Africa”: 7.

¹²³ van der Hoog, 2017, “North Korean monuments in Southern Africa”: 48, 49.

occurring in Zimbabwe too means that this particular use of history in the present is not uniquely a Swapo phenomenon.

Narratives of Early Resistance

On several levels then, the Swapo master narrative of liberation history or the creation of a ‘national history’ can be understood in terms of inclusions and exclusions, which in this case is intensified by Namibia’s ‘fragmented past’. At a point of both inclusion and exclusion, the narrative conflates the nation with Swapo. Elke Zuern notes that “Swapo is equated with liberation and support for Swapo with patriotism”.¹²⁴ To be against Swapo is to be unpatriotic to the nation as a whole, so much have they been conflated. Swapo contributions are recognized as the only contributions to the struggle for independence in official history, and even when the early resistance to colonialism at the beginning of the 20th century is included, efforts are made to link it back to Swapo. Sabine Höhn has called this the “government’s efforts to reduce the complex history of the country’s anti-colonial war to a narrative of a unified struggle”.¹²⁵ Henning Melber provides evidence for the construction by Swapo of a ‘historic continuity’ between early resistance and Swapo. Quoting President Sam Nujoma, Melber points to the Swapo rhetoric that it “was the heroic struggle of our forefathers against colonialism and imperialism that provided the necessary inspiration and impetus for the Swapo-Party to carry out the modern struggle for national liberation”.¹²⁶ Linking the early resistance to the later Swapo armed struggle allows for the notion that Swapo represents the liberation history of the nation, and therefore represents the nation itself, as a whole.

Yet, somewhat paradoxically, Ellie Hamrick and Haley Duschinski describe how “the official story of the liberation struggle does not consider Herero en masse to have participated in the struggle for Namibian independence – even as the independence struggle is described as a national movement, by and for the entire Namibian nation. Rather than including all Namibians in the liberation struggle, this state narrative essentially defines the nation as independence fighters and independence fighters as

¹²⁴ Zuern, 2012, “Memorial Politics”: 497.

¹²⁵ Sabine Höhn, 2010, “International Justice and Reconciliation in Namibia: The ICC Submission and Public Memory”, *African Affairs* 109(436): 471.

¹²⁶ Sam Nujoma quoted in Melber, 2005, “Namibia’s Past in the Present”: 105.

SWAPO members”.¹²⁷ Heike Becker refers to an “aggressive nationalism”, which “de-emphasized (cultural and regional) difference in favour of an authoritarian nation building policy” which centred Swapo in all things.¹²⁸ Thus despite purporting to represent the nation, Swapo is not inclusive of the entire nation of peoples of Namibia. It is here that the predominantly Ovambo make-up of the Swapo party becomes tantamount to understanding the politics of inclusion and exclusion in the master narrative. While Swapo promotes national unity via the slogans ‘One Namibia, One Nation’ and ‘Unity In Diversity’, it becomes apparent that some are more included than others. For example, the way in which “SWAPO funnels development aid paid by Germany in lieu of reparations – to predominantly Ovambo areas”.¹²⁹ Or the redistribution of land taken under German colonialism, using affirmative action schemes which “benefits more its main clientele in the former Owamboland” and not the descendants of those who originally lost their land.¹³⁰ In this way, it becomes problematic when Swapo crafts historical continuity and appropriates the ‘forefathers’ of the early resistance while simultaneously engaging in ethno-politics to the detriment of the minority Herero and Nama communities.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the discussions of reparations for the Nama and Herero genocide. Henning Melber in “Namibia’s Past in the Present”, Ellie Hamrick and Haley Duschinski in “Enduring Injustice” and Reinhart Kössler in his chapter “The Saga of the Skulls” all comment on the significance of memory politics in the Herero and Nama movement(s) for reparations from the German government. Broadly, these movements call for reparations in varied forms; acknowledgement, apology and financial reparations from the German government, land restitution and memorialisation. The repatriation of human remains from Germany, taken during the colonial-era for use in ‘race science’, proved a step in the right direction but was ultimately dogged by international and domestic politics.¹³¹ As of 2016, an official apology from the German government acknowledging the genocide has been promised but as

¹²⁷ Hamrick and Duschinski, 2017, “Enduring injustice”: 8.

¹²⁸ Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”: 522.

¹²⁹ Hamrick and Duschinski, 2017, “Enduring injustice”: 8.

¹³⁰ Henning Melber, 2005, “How to Come to Terms with the Past: Re-Visiting the German Colonial Genocide in Namibia”, *Africa Spectrum* 40(1): 143.

¹³¹ See Reinhart Kössler, 2015, “The Saga of the Skulls: Restitution without Recognition”, in *Namibia and Germany: Negotiating the Past* (Windhoek: University of Namibia Press).

yet has not been delivered, and the demand from affected groups for direct monetary reparations have been outrightly rejected.¹³²

The authors all attest to the notion that reparations activists are engaging in battles of counter memory against Swapo's hegemonic memory of the past, and that these memory politics have very real consequences in the present day. Implicitly acknowledged but not explicitly stated by the authors is the fact that Swapo's orientation towards the movement(s) for reparations has always been first and foremost self-serving. This is evident in Melber's argument that where Swapo does acknowledge early resistance, it conflates it with Swapo and creates a historic continuity between the early resistance and the Swapo-led armed struggle. It is also evidenced by the state's inconsistent support for the reparations movement which is explored in detail by Kössler. One example is the favouritism displayed by the state's dealings with the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Council for the Dialogue on the 1904 Genocide (OCD-1904) which is politically affiliated with Swapo, as compared to the Ovaherero Genocide Committee (OGC) which is affiliated with Swapo's opposition.¹³³ When the second delegation was sent to retrieve the human remains from Germany in 2014, the trip was announced only days prior to leaving Namibia and the delegation consisted of "no representatives of affected communities".¹³⁴ This was in stark contrast to the 2011 delegation of carefully selected representatives from all groups, who throughout and after the experience were critical of both the German and Namibian government's treatment of the issue, and this is perhaps why they were side-stepped in 2014. The deterioration of the government's will to work with the groups is also exemplified by the fact that negotiations around financial reparations are currently only be held between the German government and the Namibian government without representatives from the affected organisations or communities.¹³⁵ Kössler also comments on the 2014 repatriation citing the "concern among activists of southern and central

¹³² See Jason Burke and Phillip Oltermann, 2016, "Germany moves to atone for 'forgotten genocide' in Namibia", *The Guardian*, December 25, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/25/germany-moves-to-atone-for-forgotten-genocide-in-namibia>.

¹³³ Hamrick and Duschinski, 2017, "Enduring injustice": 9.

¹³⁴ Kössler, 2015, "The Saga of the Skulls": 308.

¹³⁵ See Burke and Oltermann, 2016, "Germany moves to atone for 'forgotten genocide' in Namibia".

communities that the government is appropriating ‘their’ history by infusing it into a national narrative”.¹³⁶

It was only in 2006 that the government officially took up the reparations issue after passing “a motion in support of the demand for an apology by Germans for the genocide and in support of reparations”.¹³⁷

It has been hinted that this was only because a second motion proposed investigating Swapo’s history of gross human rights abuse in exile and thus the former was passed as an easier (and less incriminating) alternative to the latter. Up until this point, the Swapo policy of national reconciliation swayed against any backward-looking calls for justice. In 1994, a debate in parliament took place on the topic of the disappeared detainees in exile. Nahas Angula, then the SWAPO Minister of Education and Culture, said “If you want to return to the past, fine... But we must know about the consequences of that. You will never stop anywhere. You will have to go all the way from the crimes committed from the Berlin Conference up to the 21st March 1990”.¹³⁸ The argument that to seek justice for this abuse means that one must also seek justice and truth for all prior abuses is given as a warning, not a call for action.

Reconciliation, Amnesty and Amnesia

On the topic of Swapo’s gross human rights abuses in exile, Saul and Leys note that “the demand for an investigation of the facts have been consistently resisted”.¹³⁹ They give credence to the idea that a strategy of ‘silent reconciliation’ may be effective for post-conflict societies, but question whether it was in fact reconciliation that motivated this choice in Namibia. Instead, they posit that Swapo’s choice not to investigate, to move forward with a Policy of National Reconciliation that does not truth-seek or prosecute, is a form of protection for the Swapo party and its elites. While in 1990 this particular policy was more the norm, it is the continued resistance to calls to open up the past that evidence Saul and Leys’ conclusion that the past remains closed in order to protect both Swapo comrades and Swapo legacy. Furthermore, the Policy of National Reconciliation is not a document or piece of legislature that

¹³⁶ Kössler, 2015, “Two modes of amnesia”: 147.

¹³⁷ Kössler, 2015, “The Saga of the Skulls”: 283.

¹³⁸ Saul and Leys, 2003, “Truth, Reconciliation and Amnesia”: 77.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*: 70.

physically exists, rather, it has been referred to and shaped by the rhetoric of Swapo leadership and elites mostly in the employment of dismissing calls for investigating past crimes and allegations.

Scholars of the National Reconciliation Policy have come to call it one of amnesty and amnesia, including Godwin Kornes and Reinhart Kössler. Godwin Kornes investigates the implications of the “declaration of a Policy of Reconciliation by SWAPO in 1989 and the subsequent adoption of blanket amnesty in the course of the transitional process”.¹⁴⁰ Kornes enters this discussion through the lens of the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR) and the November 2006 submission to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The violations put forward for investigation include incidents from the “SWAPO’s war of liberation against apartheid South Africa (1966-1989) and after independence, in the course of several military operations in the northern and north-eastern regions of Namibia (1994-1996; 1998-2003)”.¹⁴¹ The submission implicated several high ranking Swapo representatives, including Sam Nujoma, and was highly controversial.

The submission to the ICC brought into reminder both the crimes of the past and how they have been treated in the present. For while “representatives of SWAPO have occasionally signalled repentance and offered individual apologies... no institutionalised measures of investigation have been implemented by the state”.¹⁴² Kornes notes the closure function of the Policy of Reconciliation, referred to with consensus in the literature as “reconciliation by silence”, whereby the past remains closed and unanalysed.¹⁴³ Kornes also establishes the link between pre- and post-independence political violence because of the legacy of impunity established by the Swapo machine. Against this backdrop, Kornes discusses the movement(s) by those who were affected by SWAPO’s violations and their varied calls for transitional justice processes to open up a history that has been closed and to force “accountability and/or punitive measures” for the crimes of the past.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Kornes, 2013, “Negotiating ‘silent reconciliation’”: 3.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 2.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*: 3.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Kornes provides the essential caveat that in “historical retrospect, SWAPO’s offences cannot obscure the magnitude and systematic nature of the crimes that were committed in the name of apartheid in Namibia... They must be seen in correlation instead, in a way that remediates proportions, not responsibility”.¹⁴⁵ However, this also does not condone that crimes committed in a ‘just war’ should be met with silence and impunity as they have been since independence, especially when it is the victims who are pushing for justice. The incidents included in the ICC submission include the 1979 uprising in Zambia, leading to the detention of between one and two thousand Swapo cadres in prison camps for one year in dire conditions and between 50 and 65 summary executions during ad hoc military tribunals, although exact numbers remain well guarded secrets. In his autobiography Sam Nujoma vehemently denies the high numbers of cadres involved, alleging that these were the result of enemy propaganda.¹⁴⁶ The second and much longer incident concerns the Swapo ‘spy hunt’ that waged throughout the 1980s. It is estimated at least 2000 suspected spies were arrested, detained and tortured in the Lubango dungeons in Angola, the majority of whom were ‘disappeared’.¹⁴⁷

Kornes argues that the legacy of authoritarian political violence met with impunity can explain the Namibian State’s post-independence trespasses on human rights. The incidents Kornes refers to are the “military operations in the northern and north-eastern regions of Kavango (1994-1996) and Ohangwena, Kavango and Caprivi (1998-2003)”.¹⁴⁸ Although these violations occurred in a fundamentally different context than pre-independence, Kornes explains the similarities in what has been understood as “SWAPO’s code of conduct in ‘ordering the nation’... which the party adopted in exile, and the involvement of Sam Nujoma as President and Commander-In-Chief”.¹⁴⁹ Of the period between 1994 and 1996, the ICC submission lays charges of “systematic acts of murder, torture and CIDT [cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment; G.K] or punishment, enforced disappearances, forcible transfer of people [...], extensive night time pillage as well as planting of anti-personnel mines [...], recruitment and use of child soldiers and mercenaries”.¹⁵⁰ Of 1998 to 2003, the “full state of emergency and a

¹⁴⁵ Kornes, 2013, “Negotiating ‘silent reconciliation’”: 5.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*: 6.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*: 7.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁰ Taken from NSHR, 2006, in Kornes, 2013, “Negotiating ‘silent reconciliation’”: 8.

military crack-down” after the Caprivi Liberation Front’s secessionist attempt lead to many gross human rights violations of hundreds of people, many of them minority Mafwe and Khwe ethnicities, and the highly controversial Caprivi Treason Trial.¹⁵¹ Swapo’s continued refusal to account for these actions or openly investigate them, both pre- and post-independence, plays into the master narrative where these events are in every way possible silenced, unaddressed and refuted in official history and memorialisation projects. In such a way, amnesty is a precursor to amnesia. However, this silence has not remained uncontested, showcased by the likes of NSHR who actively pursue “reconciliation by justice” and Breaking the Wall of Silence (BWS) who opt for “reconciliation by truth”.¹⁵² BWS is an NGO and advocacy group for and by the ‘ex-detainees’ of Swapo whose mission is to exonerate those who were accused of being spies, for Swapo to issue an apology, to seek psychological support for members and to allow them to openly share their stories.¹⁵³

Thus it can be seen how the Policy of National Reconciliation has been used to dismiss investigation or acknowledgement of certain events, this is evidence of the exclusions of the Swapo master narrative and how they are determined. Indeed, the ability to create an exclusionary master narrative has been dependent on Swapo’s conception of reconciliation, of which amnesty and amnesia played a crucial role. Reinhart Kössler expands on the concept of amnesia, where “forgetting is presented as a wiser approach in contradistinction to painstaking and evasive truth-seeking” in the pursuit of reconciliation and the maintenance of peace.¹⁵⁴ However, he considers how taking up a strategy of amnesia for a government that is guilty of human rights violations is above all an act of self-preservation, in agreement with Saul and Leys’ conclusion. Kössler determines that “amnesia as a memory strategy is outside the purview of Transitional Justice”, where amnesty can be a tool that recognizes injustice but forgoes retribution, amnesia “implies that impunity is rendered and enjoyed silently”.¹⁵⁵ In the case of Namibia, however, it can be seen that amnesty and amnesia have worked in conjunction to above all protect

¹⁵¹ Kornos, 2013, “Negotiating ‘silent reconciliation’”: 8.

¹⁵² *Ibid*: 16.

¹⁵³ “About Us”, Breaking the Wall of Silence, accessed October 12, 2017, <https://sites.google.com/site/breakingthewallofsilence/about-us>.

¹⁵⁴ Kössler, 2015, “Two modes of amnesia”: 138.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*: 140.

Swapo and its elite members. In “Two modes of amnesia”, Kössler analyses two case studies of amnesia, the first concerning Germany and the 1904/08 genocide committed by the colonial army and the second concerning SWAPO’s gross human rights violations during the liberation war. In the case of the former, amnesia applied by successive German governments can be understood as a strategy to avoid the responsibility of paying reparations entailed by acknowledging the genocide.¹⁵⁶ However, with the increased activism and organisation after the 2004 centennial, both countries were forced to amend their policies of amnesia. On Namibia, Kössler notes:

“On account of considerable social mobilisation, it seems more difficult currently than in 2000 to marginalise the issue of the genocide in government policy... Thus, the founding of a national identity construct solely on the liberation struggle and on the identification of the nation with the party that issued from the liberation movement, has run into difficulties”.¹⁵⁷

As such, the history of the early resistance and genocide is “accommodated in SWAPO’s image of history, but clearly been relegated to secondary importance against the liberation war”.¹⁵⁸

The amnesia employed by the Swapo state for human rights violations during the liberation war is described by Kössler as part and parcel of the policy of reconciliation. Describing the negotiated settlement to end the war in 1989 as an “elite pact”, guaranteeing amnesty and impunity for both sides, ‘amnesia’ was posited as the means by which to reconcile a nation divided after years of colonisation and war. Under the rhetoric of the policy, ‘reconciliation’ was the answer offered in response to continued calls for investigations and truth commissions.¹⁵⁹ Elke Zuern notes that as “part of the dominant public narrative, government representatives repeatedly warn of the dangers of delving into past injustices”, justifying the need for amnesty and amnesia under the auspices of silent reconciliation.¹⁶⁰ The resistance of Swapo to engage in processes of truth finding or investigation is thus

¹⁵⁶ Kössler, 2015, “Two modes of amnesia”: 144.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*: 147.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 143.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*: 153.

¹⁶⁰ Zuern, 2012, “Memorial Politics”: 499.

a central component of how Swapo has been able to write a master narrative of history that essentially attempts to limit discussion of the past and dissent from the preferred narrative projected by Swapo.¹⁶¹

Kössler expands on what he terms Swapo's 'official remembrance policy', identifying the "two salient conceptions that are not readily reconciled".¹⁶² The first is the glorification of Swapo's military actions during the liberation struggle. The second is this "overarching concept of national reconciliation, which... has been founded on a conflation of wholesale amnesty with amnesia".¹⁶³ Yet this can be explained in terms of Swapo's master narrative as the inclusion of that which legitimises Swapo as the one true liberator of the Namibian people and the exclusion of anything that contests this, such as 1979 revolt in Zambia and Lubango dungeons. Saul and Leys note that in order to accomplish this, Swapo has used a "variety of means, ranging from mere inaction to, apparently, measures of intimidation".¹⁶⁴

Saul and Leys discuss how the issue of the Lubango dungeons has been dealt with by Swapo leadership and various other institutions and movements in Namibia. Despite the will to remember showcased by segments of Namibian society, the official government stance, in line with their notion of reconciliation, has remained unchanged all these years, they have "been determined to keep this history forgotten".¹⁶⁵ Saul and Leys compare the cases of South Africa and Namibia, who essentially reached opposite conclusions as to how to best deal with the past. Not only did South Africa undergo the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where all sides were open to investigation, but the African National Congress (ANC) even held internal commissions that investigated abuses in ANC camps. Saul and Leys argue that having the ANC "being prepared to put itself in the dock" allowed the "TRC to make as much progress on a broad range of other fronts".¹⁶⁶ The authors note that while Swapo's notion of reconciliation may have had some clout, it is impossible to ignore that it is, at the end of the day, "Swapo's desire to cover its own tracks that does indeed provide the most convincing explanation of

¹⁶¹ See John Saul, 1999, "'The dog that didn't bark in the night': Namibia's missing TRC and the South African model", *Southern African Report* (Toronto); Parleviet, 2000, "Truth Commissions in Africa: the Non-Case of Namibia and the Emerging Case of Sierra Leone".

¹⁶² Kössler, 2003, "Public Memory, Reconciliation and the Aftermath of War": 108.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Saul and Leys, "Truth, Reconciliation and Amnesia": 70.

¹⁶⁵ John Saul and Colin Leys, 2003, "Lubango and After: 'Forgotten History' as Politics in Contemporary Namibia", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29(2): 335.

¹⁶⁶ Saul and Leys, 2003, "Lubango and After": 337.

the path the movement has chosen”.¹⁶⁷ As a critic of Swapo’s reconciliation policy, Beince Gawanas, an ex-detainee of Lubango, puts the case succinctly: “We must know and we have a right to decide with whom we want to be reconciled and why”.¹⁶⁸ As it stands, the policy of reconciliation does not allow this, for it refuses to get to the truth of who was victimised, who perpetrated and why. This is of great importance, especially when those perpetrators of Lubango are still active in high government offices, such as the ‘Butcher of Lubango’ who became the commander of the armed forces post-independence.¹⁶⁹ As Saul and Leys note, it is very evident that “the secret political culture of the Lubango detention centres has been dangerously carried forward, unexamined and unchecked, into independent Namibia”.¹⁷⁰ In an analysis of the history of how the issue of Lubango has been dealt with by Swapo leadership, and the threatening rhetoric utilized, Saul and Leys determine the phrase “history was to be forgotten – or else”.¹⁷¹ This was justified by the Swapo formula on Lubango: “there were spies, war is hell, reconciliation is good” and, I would add, reconciliation is silent.¹⁷² The secret political culture is protected and reproduced in the cultivation of a master narrative of liberation history which simply excludes narratives which challenge or reflect badly on Swapo. As such, analysing the Independence Memorial Museum necessitates an awareness of how the Policy of National Reconciliation, amnesty and amnesia have been shown to have influenced how history has been written.

A major silence in the literature thus far has been the reality of gender based violence in the SWAPO camps, which has also been wilfully excluded in the Swapo master narrative, by the same functions of amnesty and amnesia. In the literature, this is perhaps because issues of gender are often only included as an afterthought, yet it is clear that the same motivations behind silencing investigation into Lubango exist for what Martha Akawa calls ‘the gender politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle’. Thus, the lens of the ‘master narrative’ allows for a holistic analysis of these inter-linked post-independence silences. In “The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle”, Martha Akawa attempts to analyse the struggle from a gender perspective. One of her main conclusions, considering what has

¹⁶⁷ Saul and Leys, 2003, “Lubango and After”: 337.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*: 338.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*: 346.

¹⁷² *Ibid*: 352.

come after independence for Namibian women, is that gender equality was a rallying cry for Swapo to gain domestic and international support but that in reality, the pursuit of gender equality was underplayed and underachieved. Akawa writes that there are “discrepancies between the roles played by women and the contributions made by them during the war and the rewards and acknowledgement offered to them in independent Namibia”.¹⁷³ Akawa shows unquestionably that women fought alongside men, in both similar and dissimilar ways, for liberation and that the war would have been hard won without the support of Namibian women. Post-independence, she is sceptical of a narrative which glorifies women while at the same time misconstrues their many contributions, invisibilises their suffering and which after independence did not equate into real gains for gender equality in Namibia. Akawa shows that not only was sexual violence prevalent within SWAPO camps, it took many forms and was met, ultimately, with impunity both during and after the struggle years. The misrepresentation of women and their roles during the struggle, and the continued claims of gender equality during the struggle, are part and parcel of the Swapo master narrative which cannot represent the former truthfully while expounding the latter.

Through the Barrel of the Gun: Militarism and Masculinity

A major theme within the Swapo master narrative is the notion that liberation was won ‘through the barrel of the gun’, yet literature on this particular theme has noted that the historical accuracy of this is questionable, arguing that Swapo disproportionately emphasises the importance of the armed struggle to the gaining of independence.¹⁷⁴ The concept of militarism describes “a mindset or ideology that accords high value to military qualities” and will be used to explain this key part of the Swapo master narrative.¹⁷⁵ Feminist scholar Cynthia Cockburn shows how militarism and violent masculinity share foundational qualities and are used to prop one another up; the military complex dependent on violent

¹⁷³ Martha Akawa, 2014, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien): 3.

¹⁷⁴ See Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”; Henning Melber, 2003, “‘Namibia, land of the brave’: selective memories on war and violence within nation building”, in *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History*, ed. Jon Abbink, Mirjam de Bruijn and Klaas van Walraven (The Netherlands: Brill).

¹⁷⁵ Cynthia Cockburn, 2007, “Gender, violence and war: what feminism says to war studies”, in *From Where We Stand: War, Women’s Activism and Feminist Analysis* (London and New York: Zed Books): 237.

men and men being told that dominance and aggression are qualities of ‘real men’. In Namibia, Heroes’ Acre stands as a visual representation of the glorified militarism that shapes the Swapo master narrative. Heike Becker notes the “distinctly masculinized, phallic and militaristic imagery” at the site, embodied by the statue of the ‘Unknown Soldier’ (a man resembling Sam Nujoma with a grenade held in his raised fist), the giant white obelisk and the mural art which showcase an armed war leading to independence.¹⁷⁶ In over emphasising the armed struggle, other narratives of resistance are silenced, such as the contributions of men and especially women on the home front. The emphasis on ‘through the barrel of the gun’ also helps to explain the invisibilisation of women in the struggle narrative put forward by Swapo.¹⁷⁷ Author Redi Tlhabi, although commenting on the South African context, eloquently describes the intersection between militarism and violence against women and the silences that follows:

“In a way, the rape of some women and children in exile debunks the heroic narrative of the struggle. It also debunks the dominant patterns of self-glorification. The ruling party has, largely, been in denial about this, choosing instead a narrative that speaks only of the heroism and sacrifices of so many gallant comrades – a narrative that is true, but incomplete. The war against apartheid was fought on and across women’s and children’s bodies. Many paid the price”.¹⁷⁸

Heike Becker in “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana” argues that in terms of public ‘memory narrations’ in Namibia, “the country’s ritual political calendar and monumentalization all celebrate the armed struggle from exile as the foundation of national liberation”.¹⁷⁹ Official post-colonial memorialisation is almost strictly reserved for the actions and events of the SWAPO led period of armed resistance. In her research conducted since 1990 in Ovamboland, Becker has identified that among individuals and communities counter memory about the liberation war continues to contest what she also refers to as Swapo’s ‘master narrative’ of the national liberation. One man with whom she

¹⁷⁶ Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”: 528.

¹⁷⁷ See Cockburn, “Gender, violence and war”; Yaliwe Clarke, 2008, “Security Sector Reform in Africa: A Lost Opportunity to Deconstruct Militarised Masculinities”, *Feminist Africa* 10.

¹⁷⁸ Redi Tlhabi, 2017, *Khwezi* (South Africa: Jonathan Ball Publishers): 43.

¹⁷⁹ Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”: 522.

spoke evidences how the master narrative has translated into a reality in which only those recognized by Swapo have benefitted post-independence:

“The problem is that they ‘empower’ [in English] only those of us that went across the borders into exile. But the fact that we remained here does not mean that we did not help to liberate the land. We gave them food, shelter and information to prevent floggings and imprisonment. If our cries were to be weighed up, they would probably weigh more than theirs”.¹⁸⁰

This comment also emphasises both the ‘forgotten’ efforts and contributions of those who did not actively participate in the armed war, but also the will to keep counter memory alive and critique a political culture that has not acknowledged or rewarded those who fall outside the master narrative, namely those who were not Swapo elites and combatants. Swapo’s official history is thus contested by collective memory in Ovamboland. Becker also noted that “people’s recollections expressed ambiguous memories”, such “complex histories, of betrayal and killings by both the *boers* and the SWAPO guerrillas”.¹⁸¹ Such memories derail the notion of Swapo as the benevolent liberators of the Namibian people, and as such do not exist in the Swapo master narrative or official history sanctioned by the Namibian leadership.

Yet the truth of ‘through the barrel of the gun’ is questionable, and prompts deliberations on why this particular facet of Namibian struggle history has come to dominate the narrative. Henning Melber asserts that while “without the existence of the armed struggle, the diplomatic and political successes as well as the internal mobilization of Namibians could not have been achieved to such a degree”, in fact, “SWAPO’s military activities were never as effective and successful as efforts on the diplomatic front”.¹⁸² Therefore, while the armed struggle played an essential role in the bringing of independence, the notion that independence was won ‘through the barrel of the gun’ is a gross oversimplification of reality. Melber argues that for SWAPO, the “battlefield offered few, if any, victories over the South

¹⁸⁰ Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”: 519.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*: 523.

¹⁸² Melber, 2003, “‘Namibia, land of the brave’: selective memories on war and violence within nation building”: 312, 313.

African forces of occupation”.¹⁸³ However, defeat and continued violence at the hands of the oppressors helped to construct a “growing identity in the struggle”, based on notions of sacrifice, martyrdom and for survivors (read as all Namibians) to avenge the dead by continuing the fight against oppression.¹⁸⁴ Melber thus draws on Frantz Fanon’s notion of the ‘midwife function’, whereby the armed struggle delivered a national consciousness.¹⁸⁵ Melber shows how Swapo still maintained the rhetoric of ‘through the barrel of the gun’, by linking the negotiated transition to the armed struggle such as in the Swapo publication *The Combatant* by stating:

“...the intensification of the armed liberation struggle for the last 22 years has finally made South Africa seek a negotiated solution to Namibia’s independence problem and avert a humiliating defeat that would shatter its dreams of being the so-called regional superpower”.¹⁸⁶

Melber also notes that “many of the high-ranking office bearers still have a track record as comrades” and that the “situational application of militant rhetoric as a tool for inclusion or exclusion in terms of post-colonial national identity is common practice”.¹⁸⁷ This has bearing on Heike Becker’s research, where those who did not go into exile, and by extension are not recognized as having played a role in the armed struggle, articulate and lament having been excluded in both rhetorical and political senses by the Swapo government. While the notion of ‘through the barrel of the gun’ is thus exaggerated in the master narrative, it has also led to these exclusions and silences in post-independence Namibia.

Memorialisation in Namibia

Elke Zuern, Heike Becker and Chandra Frank have all respectively written at length about Namibia’s current memorial landscape.¹⁸⁸ All share certain touchpoints, with one another and literature discussed in the previous sections, despite the different considerations of their arguments. All note that official public memory is dominated by the rhetoric and inclusions/exclusions of the Swapo master narrative of

¹⁸³ Melber, 2003, “‘Namibia, land of the brave’: selective memories on war and violence within nation building”: 313.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: 316.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: 322.

¹⁸⁸ See Frank, 2012, “A Memorial or an Anti-Memorial?”; Zuern, 2012, “Memorial Politics”; Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”.

liberation history. Chandra Frank notes that the “monuments do not stand, in themselves, as objects of knowledge but rather are formed and dominated by heritage makers, stakeholders in the production of (public) history and by stakeholders such as governments who decide what shall be remembered and what shall not”.¹⁸⁹ However, while public or official memorialisation is monopolised by this Swapo narrative, community or grassroots examples of memorialisation do provide challenges to official memory and construct counter memory. Yet they remain un-endorsed and unsupported by state institutions. The Swakopmund Memorial Cemetery is not ‘placed on the map’ for tourists or locals in the same way the museum is. A community initiative, the addition of monuments to commemorate the genocide and the building of a wall to unify the previously racially segregated cemetery, the Swakopmund Memorial Cemetery does not fit with the master narrative and the glorified memorialisation it partakes in.¹⁹⁰ As of yet, none of these authors have extended this analysis of memorialisation to the Independence Memorial Museum, although their work is essential for placing the Independence Memorial Museum into a longer history of how and why official memorialisation by the Namibian state has been conducted. This research aims to fill this gap by contextualising the Independence Memorial Museum through the lens of the Swapo master narrative of liberation history as it is only through such a lens can the choices made in constructing the museum and its content be understood.

Lastly, what ties the master narrative together is the way in which Swapo has executed its public memorialisation ventures. The Mansudae Overseas Project has repeatedly been commissioned by the Namibian state to design and build memorial projects, most recently the Independence Memorial Museum, but also the Okahandja Military Museum, the State House and Heroes’ Acre. The Mansudae Overseas Project is not solely patronised by the Namibian state. Other African countries where Mansudae has been active include Angola, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Benin and Senegal.

¹⁸⁹ Frank, 2012, “A Memorial or an Anti-Memorial?”: 2.

¹⁹⁰ See Frank, 2012, “A Memorial or an Anti-Memorial?”.

As Megan Kirkwood argues, the employment of Mansudae has been deliberate, not a matter of convenience but of objectives. Mansudae Overseas Project is a North Korean design firm, an international division of the Mansudae Art Studio, located in Pyongyang, the capital city of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The Mansudae Art Studio is responsible for the production of the majority of official public monuments, artworks and buildings in Pyongyang, and its international division has to date completed four major projects in Namibia.¹⁹¹ Kirkwood notes that while the projects vary throughout these countries, the 'iconographic programs' of the constructions "remain formally similar, effectively emulating the Socialist Realist aesthetic of the art and architecture of Pyongyang".¹⁹² Her central argument is that Mansudae was awarded the architectural tenders, not for economic favours or gratefulness for DPRK's support in the liberation struggle, but in order to "emulate the authority, cohesiveness and directed nature of a visual culture specific to Pyongyang".¹⁹³

In order to understand why the Swapo Leadership would want to emulate North Korean memorialisation, Kirkwood provides a comparative analysis between Mansudae constructions in Namibia and in Pyongyang. Pyongyang stands as a visual celebration and commemoration of North Korean history, its liberation and its leader. This is achieved through the use of a "unified, omnipresent visual culture, wherein monuments and visual references to the Great Leader serve to remind citizens of their leaders' legitimacy and achievements towards North Korean self-definition after a period of Japanese colonial Rule".¹⁹⁴ Kirkwood argues that when founding president Sam Nujoma visited Pyongyang in 2000 and actively saw and partook in a shared national history, in the rituals surrounding the many memorials around the city (laying wreaths of flowers, moments of silence), it was likely that he perceived Pyongyang "positively as a city remembering its past and a great leader not entirely out of obligation, but out of gratefulness".¹⁹⁵ That Nujoma would want to initiate this back home in Namibia, the two countries sharing a similar history, he himself styled as a Great Leader, is not surprising.¹⁹⁶ It is also relevant that Swapo effectively runs the country as a single party state, given its control of "both

¹⁹¹ Kirkwood, 2011, "Postcolonial Architecture Through North Korean Modes": 2.

¹⁹² *Ibid*: 3.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*: iii.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*: 11.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*: 18.

¹⁹⁶ Sam Nujoma is officially titled the Founding Father of Namibia.

executive and legislative branches of the Namibian government” and facing no significant opposition.¹⁹⁷

The motivation behind the granting of tenders to Mansudae was thus in the desire of the Namibian leadership to “assert their authority, modernity and secure their legitimacy”, such as has been done in Pyongyang.¹⁹⁸

Kirkwood’s comparative analysis includes Heroes’ Acre, the State House and various monuments within Pyongyang. She found several points of contact and even explicit likeness between the visual modes and aesthetics employed throughout these memorial landscapes. For example, the use of flowers of symbolic significance in North Korea being incorporated into portraits and murals. She argues that this works to establish a link between the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) and the natural landscape, to imply their unquestionable and natural belonging. The same tactic has been used in the state house, with murals of Namibian landscapes and the reoccurring use of the indigenous *Welwitschia* plant. At the time of writing, the independence museum was not open to the public, and so Kirkwood only examines its controversial construction and not its content. However, she does argue that what can be expected of the museum is to “symbolically inscribe public memory in favour of the post-colonial regime”.¹⁹⁹ Kirkwood’s argument as to how and why Mansudae has been operating in Namibia therefore provides key insights to be drawn upon in analysing the Independence Memorial Museum, in terms of its intentionality of design and symbolism.

¹⁹⁷ Kirkwood, 2011, “Postcolonial Architecture Through North Korean Modes”: 11.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*: 9.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*.

The Independence Memorial Museum

The following chapter presents a critical analysis of the Independence Memorial Museum utilizing fieldwork conducted in and around the museum, and photographs collected over several visits to the museum in 2016-17. The museum consists of three floors, each floor housing a gallery; the first floor exhibits 'Colonial Repression', the second 'Liberation War' and the third the 'Road to Independence' and the 'History Panorama'. The main contents of the museum include photographs, artefacts and artworks such as paintings, murals, statues and installations. Although televisions and stands for other devices are scattered throughout, they have never in several visits been switched on or appear to be in working condition. The painting, murals and statues are all the work of Mansudae, North Korean signatures can be seen at the bottom left of most of the large wall murals. Information on who curated the museum is not readily available. Throughout, there is a considerable lack of information available to the visitor. While most photographs are showcased with blurbs of information, the exhibits do not give a sense of context or tell a complete narrative of an event or period. For example, there is no exhibit which details how and when German colonialism began in Namibia, its effects or when it ended. Rather, there is a succession of exhibits which reference key events, but do not explain their significance or links. 'Early Resistance Against Colonialism', 'The Chamber of Horrors' and 'Namibia As a Battlefield In the First World War' are three sequential exhibits which give little indication of their shared chronology. In this chapter, a comparative analysis considering both the museum and the identified Swapo master narrative that long predates it will allow for commentary on how the latest official act of memorialisation contributes to and continues Swapo's master narrative of liberation history.

Memorial Politics of the Reiter

The removal of the Reiterdenkmal in 2009 to make way for the museum sparked numerous political and media debates. To understand these debates, we need to contextualise the site and monuments which existed there before the construction of the museum. The Alte Feste is the German Schutztruppe fort

dating back to 1890 that has housed Namibia's National Museum since 1962.²⁰⁰ As the Schutztruppe headquarters in Windhoek, the concentration camp known locally as Orumbo rua Katjombondi ('a place of horror') developed around the fort during the war period from 1904 to 1908. Today there is still a plaque outside that states the Alte Feste was built to 'preserve peace and order between the rivalling Namas and Hereros', a grossly inaccurate description of why the fort was built which has not been amended by the post-independence state.

In 1910, the Christuskirche was built, marking "the victory of the colonial power".²⁰¹ In 1923, eight bronze plates were installed in the church, commemorating "as heroes all German soldiers and civilians who died during the German colonial period in armed confrontation and war".²⁰² Lastly, the Reiterdenkmal was inaugurated in 1912, commemorating fallen German soldiers and celebrating the "so-called victory of the Schutztruppen ("The Protection Army") over the indigenous Ovaherero and Nama".²⁰³ Laragh Larsen discusses the re-placing of imperial landscapes in Kenya as part of the decolonisation agenda, noting how colonial monuments in public spaces served as "visual links to the British Empire, and served as a means of asserting imperial power".²⁰⁴ However, as part of the negotiated settlement and reconciliation efforts in Namibia, it was decided to not remove any pre-existing monuments. Thus, the perpetrators of the genocide continued to be commemorated, their actions symbolically justified, with German Namibians laying wreaths of flowers at the Reiterdenkmal up until it was moved in 2009.²⁰⁵ On the land where a concentration camp had once stood, no memorialisation in honour of the victims of the German genocide existed until the Independence Memorial Museum.

²⁰⁰ I did not get the opportunity to visit this museum. Comparing the two museums which sit side by side would have offered new lines of analysis in this study, and is an opportunity for expanding this study in future.

²⁰¹ Kössler, 2015, "Namibia's Century of Colonialism": 27.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Andrew Byerley, 2011, "Monumental Politics in Namibia", *Nordic Africa Institute Annual Report* (Uppsala: NAI): 37.

²⁰⁴ Laragh Larsen, 2012, "Re-placing imperial landscapes: colonial monuments and the transition to independence in Kenya", *Journal of Historical Geography* 38: 45.

²⁰⁵ Frank, 2012, "A Memorial or and Anti-Memorial?": 3.



Fig. 1 The Alte Feste plaque

With the announcement that the Reiterdenkmal would be moved to make way for the Independence Memorial Museum, opinions poured into local newspapers showcasing a multifaceted response by the Namibian public. Debates in parliament where the motion was passed ensued too. There were those who vehemently opposed the re-siting of the statue, for various reasons. Many, both German and Namibian, cited concerns about what they considered the erasure or rewriting of history. Andreas Vogt, a Namibian historian who opposed to the re-siting, wrote: “Irrespective of its ideological burden, and in the context of the shared colonial history of Africans and Europeans, it should not be overlooked that the Equestrian Monument is both part of German history as well as African history”.²⁰⁶ Arguments of this nature, about the erasure of history, prompted many responses of ‘whose history?’ was being commemorated by the existing memorials. This was similar to the debates the revolved around the statue of Cecil John Rhodes during the Rhodes Must Fall student movement of 2015. Writing to *The Namibian* newspaper, John Pombili expressed:

²⁰⁶ Andreas Vogt, 2008, “To move or not to move:”, *The Namibian*, July 18, <https://www.namibian.com.na/44210/archive-read/To-move-or-not-to-move---On-the-relocation-of>.

“WHAT arrogance it is for people who consider themselves Namibian to want to keep a colonial insult on their national identity alive for so long after they have earned their freedom. Unless they do not consider themselves to be complete Namibians, why hold on to imperial splendour embodied by an arrogant statue standing on a gravesite. Would they like it if their relatives were murdered and instead of putting a remembrance stone, we rather put proud statues of their killers on top of their graves?”²⁰⁷

In 2012, the centennial of the Reiterdenkmal was privately celebrated by members of the German community. In a letter to *The Namibian*, J Veii and S Cloete wrote: “It smacks of arrogance and utter insensitivity to have had this ceremony for the 100th commemoration of this colonial monument”.²⁰⁸ Both commentators saw a hypocrisy in the support for the statue and the continued lack of recognition for the genocide and silence on the issue of German reparations.

However, those who argued to keep the Reiterdenkmal were not only from the German community. Dre Ndjai identifies himself as an Otjiherero-speaker in a letter to *The Namibian*, arguing that the statue is a “part of our history”, and that this “doesn't mean I am happy with what happened to the Hereros and Namas but given the fact that our history is barely taught in schools, nor being written in the history books; it is essential that the statue remains”.²⁰⁹ Commenting on the lack of recognition and memorialisation for the genocide, Ndjai believes that the “removal has more to do with the elimination of our history (Hereros and Namas) than what has been stated by the president”.²¹⁰ These concerns would prove to be warranted, as will be explored later in this chapter. In lieu of other forms of recognition and memorialisation, the Reiterdenkmal was the closest reference point for the genocide and Ndjai worried that its removal would mean “there will be nothing to show to our generation as to what happened in 1904-1908 other than mere stories”.²¹¹

For some, the statue symbolised the resistance their forefathers waged, as opposed to celebrating a German victory. For others, the museum presented an opportunity to properly memorialise the genocide

²⁰⁷ John Pombili, 2012, “Move Reiter to Katutura”, *The Namibian*, August 03, <https://www.namibian.com.na/98311/archive-read/Move-Reiter-To-Katutura-WHAT-arrogance-it-is-for>.

²⁰⁸ J Veil and S Cloete, 2012, “On Genocide and Reparations”, *The Namibian*, January 10, <https://www.namibian.com.na/91491/archive-read/On-Genocide-and-Reparations-IT-IS-simply>.

²⁰⁹ Ndjai, 2013, “Keep the Reiterdenkmal”.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

of 1904-08. In 2011, before the museum had opened to the public, Usutuaije Maamberua, “a Herero leader of the main national opposition party, introduced a motion in Namibia’s Parliament calling for the planned Independence Memorial Museum to be renamed the Genocide Remembrance Centre”.²¹² Maamberua commented on what he saw as the deliberate ‘sobering’ of the site of the concentration camp:

“In Namibia the colonizers have erected the Windhoek High School, the Alte Feste Museum, the Reiter, Christuskirche, and the very beautiful and aromatic gardens being a desperate attempt for that environment to look innocent, holy, humane, and sober... Twenty-one years after independence, still no symbol reminding us and the world about the genocide committed on our territory”.²¹³

Maamberua goes on to assert that the Independence Memorial Museum would be “redundant”, given that “the naming of streets, stadiums, and a plethora of other commemorative symbols and institutions already ensures the remembrance of the national liberation struggle”.²¹⁴ The motion did not pass in parliament. However, Maamberua’s remarks reveal a critical understanding of the way in which the Swapo master narrative has been consolidated since independence, focusing on the SWAPO era and excluding any narratives which jeopardise the view that SWAPO was the sole liberator of the Namibian people.

Other criticisms of the project included the “price tag that could accompany the construction of the proposed museum, the lack of broad-based public consultation and administrative transparency in the allocation of the tenders for the architectural design and construction of the proposed memorial, to some other general concerns relating to the socio-political, economic and cultural implications that may be yielded through the execution of these plans”.²¹⁵ In an anonymous letter to *The Namibian*, a self-described ‘concerned citizen’ decried the fact that at “no stage was this project put up for competition

²¹² Hamrick and Duschinski, 2017, “Enduring injustice”: 2.

²¹³ Quoted in part from Hamrick and Duschinski, 2017, “Enduring injustice”: 2.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Phanel Kaapama, 2008, “Memory Politics, The Reiterdenkmal And The De-Colonisation Of The Mind”, *The Namibian*, August 22, <https://www.namibian.com.na/41366/archive-read/Memory-Politics-The-Reiterdenkmal-And-The->

by Namibian architects, even though we have several well-qualified previously disadvantaged architects able to design such a project”.²¹⁶ The same citizen noted that no community input had gone into the museum, and that the site of the proposed museum would be “right in the middle of the government and administrative area, away from the very people whose freedom it is supposed to represent”.²¹⁷ John Pombili wrote that the “Reiterdenkmal statue should be nowhere near that gravesite it should be relocated to Katutura for the name Katutura means the place where we don't want to go, hence let's honour those colonial oppressors by taking that monument to the place they don't want it to go”.²¹⁸ Considering a more inclusive site, and one that would be beneficial for local economies, it was suggested that the museum could be constructed at a “significant site like the Old Location cemetery, or in Katutura, Mondesa, or Walvis Bay - any site where important historical events related to took place - would be much more suitable from a historical and potential economic development viewpoint”.²¹⁹ Lastly, there were those who berated the idea of government spending on the museum when ‘bread and butter’ issues are still prevalent in Namibian society. In a cellular text message to the Namibian, one commenter wrote:

“DEAR Government, will the Independence Memorial Museum feed the poor, upgrade schools, pay teachers' salaries or provide better healthcare? I think not. You are polluting our country with unnecessary junk and wasting our money on yet another monument that won't benefit us. Trying to erase the past won't build a stronger country or feed its people. Come on! Try to think further than the length of your noses!”²²⁰

While in no way has the full spectrum of public opinion on the Reiterdenkmal and the Independence Memorial Museum been showcased here, the former excerpts were included to point at some key concerns which will help to illuminate my analysis of the Swapo master narrative and the museum to come. The investment of segments of the public shown by the offering of these opinions is telling of

²¹⁶ “Appropriate Memorial, Inappropriate Site”, 2008, *The Namibian*, June 13, <https://www.namibian.com.na/45396/archive-read/Appropriate-Memorial-Inappropriate-Site>.

²¹⁷ “Appropriate Memorial, Inappropriate Site”, 2008.

²¹⁸ Pombili, 2012, “Move Reiter to Katutura”.

²¹⁹ “Appropriate Memorial, Inappropriate Site”, 2008.

²²⁰ “SMSes of the Day: Thursday”, 2008, *The Namibian*, June 12, https://www.namibian.com.na/45392/archive-read/SMSes-of-the-Day--Thursday--*-DEAR-Government.

several things. While official memory is inscribed at the top, it is not necessarily accepted by those on the ground. In fact, official memorialisation can instigate counter-memory discussions and activism by way of opening space for them. Only in the decision to remove the statue did members of the public openly begin to publicise their particular views, and criticisms, of Swapo and official memorialisation since independence. Particularly, the fears of members of the Herero and Nama communities that the museum would obliterate all that was left of physical memory of the genocide, albeit that being a statue in honour of those who perpetrated the genocide, is telling of the way in which their history had been unacknowledged and written out of the Swapo master narrative of liberation history, one which conflates the nation with Swapo.

The New Statues



Fig. 2 The Genocide Memorial Statue, in front of the Alte Feste with the Independence Memorial Museum visible to the left. In addition to the Independence Memorial Museum, two statues were erected in the surrounding area. As can be seen in Fig. 2, the Genocide Memorial Statue stands in the foreground of the Alte Feste. Shown is a statue of a man and woman standing each with a fist raised and the remnants of broken chains attached, an archetypal liberation symbol representing the 'breaking the chains' of oppression.

On the stone pedestal reads ‘Their Blood Waters our Freedom’. The phrase is one that has been adopted by Swapo, it appears in the national anthem, and is the name of the Swapo publication also known as the ‘Book of Dead’, which listed the names of Namibians who died during the liberation struggle. On the brass relief below is depicted a scene of two men and a woman having been hanged from a tree, while two armed soldiers in uniform look on. The reference is to the many executions by hanging that took place during the 1904-08 genocide. On the back side of the monument is another relief, copied from an infamous photo of skin and bone victims of the genocide, chained to one another. The monument is the first act of commemoration of the genocide on the actual site of Orumbo rua Katjombondi. However, explicit reference to the genocide, its victims and perpetrators and the significance of the land it is situated on, is not established by the monument. No information is provided, not even the use of the word ‘genocide’ on the monument. This is problematic in a context where the correct use of the term in reference to the events of 1904-08 had to be fought for, was only recognized as such by Germany in 2004 and that there are still those today who refute that what occurred was in fact a genocide.²²¹ According to Esther Muinjangué, even the clothing adorned by the statues is not a historically accurate representation of either Herero or Nama dress at the time.²²² This attempt at making visible the history of the genocide in reality works to invisibilise those whom the genocide was perpetrated against, the Nama and Herero people. The inclusion of the Swapo turn of phrase ‘their blood waters our freedom’ on the plinth implicitly connects the genocide to the SWAPO era of the struggle, creating what Henning Melber noted as a ‘historic continuity’ between the two, such that we view the monument through the lens of Swapo despite the fact that the genocide predates the formation of Swapo by almost half a century.²²³ Thus, even when the genocide and early resistance is commemorated and included in the official narrative, there remains a clear emphasis on Swapo. The forthcoming analysis of the treatment of the genocide within the museum will attest to and expand upon these observations of the Genocide Memorial Statue in reference to the Swapo master narrative.

²²¹ See Melber, 2005, “How to Come to Terms with the Past”.

²²² Esther Muinjangué, 2018, Personal communication with author, February 7.

²²³ Melber, 2005, “Namibia’s Past in the Present”: 105.



Fig. 3 The Sam Nujoma Statue

The other statue stands immediately in front of the museum, and depicts Sam Nujoma, holding the constitution raised above his head. On the plinth is written ‘Namibia is Forever Free, Sovereign and Independent 21st March 1990’ and the plaque reads ‘Dr. Sam Nujoma founding president and father of the Namibian nation’. The statue outside the museum recalls a very similar one at Heroes’ Acre. Called ‘The Unknown Soldier’, it is well acknowledged that the statue is modelled on and represents Sam Nujoma. At Heroes’ Acre, he holds a grenade above his head, at the Independence Memorial Museum it is the Constitution. The change in accessory is telling of the shifts in meaning attributed to each site. Whereas Heroes’ Acre commemorates those who lived and died fighting for the liberation of the county, the Sam Nujoma statue outside the Independence Memorial Museum seems to signal a prioritization and celebration of democracy and good governance. What is unchanged, however, is the centring and hero-worship of Sam Nujoma in the story of Namibia’s past, the man who is still the face and powerhouse of the Swapo Party.

Early Resistance and the Genocide

Given the Swapo master narrative, which waivers between writing out the early resistance or connecting itself to it, it is not unsurprising that early resistance history has been included in the museum. There would surely have been huge criticism if it had been left out, as was shown by those commentators who were critical that the new museum would continue to only glorify Swapo. Early resistance history is included in the first gallery 'Colonial Repression'. This covers both early resistance to German colonialism, the German Colonial genocide, and extends to the period of South African occupation. In this extension, there is created a historic continuity between these two eras of history, working to legitimise Swapo as the true and singular liberators who continued the struggle begun by their forefathers, or so the master narrative would imply. In naming the first gallery, the choice of 'Colonial Repression' implies a passivity and undermines the acknowledgement that resistance was a defining feature of Namibia's German colonial period. There is seemingly an unwillingness to pre-empt the organised resistance that is presented later in the 'Liberation War' gallery that only concerns Swapo efforts.



Fig. 4 Early Resistance Leaders and Sam Nujoma

In the first exhibit in the ‘Colonial Repression’ gallery, there are nine brass renderings of ‘Early Resistance Leaders’. Their names are included, but no information is provided as to who they were and what they did. Placed in between these renderings, centre stage and approximately four times the size of any of the brasses is a portrait of Sam Nujoma, in cameo military wear, on a background of the Namibian flag, flanked by two Namibian flags and positioned over a plastic model of Namibia’s national plant, the Welwitschia. Meghan Kirkwood has noted Swapo’s use of North Korean modes of memorialisation, and comments on the use of nature and landscape to promote continuity and connection between leaders and their countries. Here, it can be seen that placing the portrait of Sam Nujoma above a Welwitschia is an attempt to infer Nujoma as himself a vital and natural part of Namibia. As a portrait, and in its size, Nujoma’s representation here aesthetically dominates and overpowers the others. Given that Nujoma was not even born when early resistance was being waged, his forceful injection into this narrative sends a message that while early resistance can be acknowledged, it will never outweigh the importance of Swapo-led resistance, as represented by the father of the nation, Sam Nujoma.

The inclusion of early resistance history within the museum is limited to the first gallery ‘Colonial Repression’, to representations of identified ‘Early Resistance Leaders’ and the exhibit ‘Early Resistance Against Colonialism’, presented through photographs and busts of male resistance leaders. Each image is accompanied by a ‘blurb’, but holistically very little information is provided as to the sequence of events, the main actors, the organisation of the resistance, or how or why it occurred. There is an explicit lack of information regarding how German colonialism affected the regions, and peoples, of Namibia differently. The resistance to colonialism was primarily waged by the Nama and Herero people, as they were the predominant groups in the southern, central and eastern regions of Namibia where German colonials initiated direct rule and settler colonialism. It was the German colonial policies and treaties that took land and cattle from these groups which instigated the Namibian German war that culminated in the genocide. At worst, the lack of information provided in the museum regarding this early history is a deliberate choice, and at best it is poor design and curatorship. However, in terms of the Swapo master narrative, which presents Swapo at the forefront of the fight against colonial

oppression on behalf of a united people, it should be noted that including this early history would problematise the notion of Swapo as representative and inclusive of a singular 'Namibian Nation'. That Swapo is predominantly made up of Ovambo-speakers is relevant because of the large absence of the Ovambo population in the early resistance history. The overall effect is that the narrative framing of this gallery creates a historic continuity between the early resistance and later period of SWAPO resistance, however, not allowing the former to overshadow the latter, justifying its place in the Swapo master narrative.

The genocide is dealt with in only one exhibit, 'The Chamber of Horrors'. In 'Early Resistance Against Colonialism', one photograph shows Orumbo rua Katjombondi, the concentration camp in Windhoek situated on the same land that the Independence Memorial Museum was built. In the accompanying blurb, this history of the site is not directly acknowledged. As already mentioned, it is somewhat difficult to grasp how a national museum could be built on the site of a concentration camp, and not grapple more directly with that history. Although the site was not preserved, and the city built up in and around it over the years, this does not mean that it should go unacknowledged.



Fig. 5 Photograph of Orumbo rua Katjombondi

The following exhibit, the ‘Chamber of Horrors’, is a room styled like a cave with a dark and rocky interior. On one wall a portrait of a German soldier is presented and the emblazoned date ‘02/10/1904’. The portrait and date are in reference to Lieutenant-General Lothar von Trotha’s issuing of the order to exterminate all Herero from the region, marking the beginning of the Herero and Nama Genocide. However, without previous knowledge of this date, a visitor to the museum would not be able to ascertain what the exhibit refers to, as no information is provided with reference to either the perpetrators or the victims of the genocide. On the walls of the ‘chamber’ are brass reliefs of mostly male figures, toiling in chains and writhing in agony. Chains and shackles hang from the ceiling.



Fig. 6 Portrait of Lieutenant-General Lothar von Trotha and brass reliefs in the Chamber of Horrors



Fig. 7 Shackles and brass reliefs in the Chamber of Horrors

The sensationalism of the exhibit, paired with the gross lack of information provided about the genocide, does little to respectfully commemorate the immense suffering inflicted and the enormous cost of human life. As with the Genocide Memorial Statue outside, the Herero and Nama go unnamed as the primary victims of the genocide. In the exhibit itself, reverence for the genocide is negated by the carnivalesque exhibit, the chaotic representation of piles of victims in the brass reliefs and the design of the ‘chamber’ as an attraction, a cheaply immersive experience for the visitor in the darkened and oppressive atmosphere. The choice to memorialise the genocide in this way is also bewildering, given that there are photographs in existence which more accurately depict the suffering of and crimes committed against the Herero and Nama people.²²⁴ In thinking through this exhibit as a form of symbolic reparation, while it does provide acknowledgement, it is of a superficial and surface level kind. There is no engagement with the reality of genocide and the human experience of it. I would also argue that the graphic and explicit nature of the exhibit has the potential to be triggering as opposed to reparative to the later generations of the affected communities. The motion to rename the museum ‘The

²²⁴ For an assortment of photographic evidence see Olusoga and Erichsen, 2011, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust*.

Genocide Remembrance Centre' indicates the desire for remembrance, but what the 'Chamber of Horrors' provides is a spectacle of human pain.

Attempting to explain this treatment of the genocide in the museum through the Swapo master narrative recalls Henning Melber's assertion that "the glorification of liberation warfare... leaves no room for true mourning".²²⁵ Although not referencing the genocide here, this observation is still relevant as it through the mode of 'glorification' that the museum and everything within it has been designed. In analyses of the work of Mansudae Overseas Project and the memorial landscape of Pyongyang, we see that the glorification of violent history is a mode of North Korean postcolonial memorialisation that has been imported into Namibia through Heroes' Acre and now The Independence Memorial Museum. The first gallery works to solidly conflate early resistance narratives with the later formation of Swapo. Sam Nujoma is consistently iconised throughout, to cement him firmly within this narrative. The invisibilisation of the victims of the genocide can be explained with reference to the "aggressive nationalism" pursued by Swapo, which "de-emphasized (cultural and regional) difference in favour of an authoritarian nation building policy" and extended this to the construction of an official history.²²⁶ Esther Muinjangué affirms that the Swapo led government whose support base is the majority Ovambo ethnic group, was not affected by the German and Herero war, or the genocide, and hence do not necessarily associate themselves with that history.²²⁷ It is my interpretation that this explains the flippant and vague way in which the genocide is dealt with in the museum, as it is not a history Swapo stands to benefit from in commemorating in any genuine way.

Liberation Through the Barrel of the Gun

The glorification of violence is continued in the presentation of the 'Liberation War' in the next gallery. Immediately preceding it, the 'Colonial Repression Gallery' ends with a statue of Sam Nujoma, in military wear with his fist raised is set against a painted Namibian landscape, repeating the motif of hero worship and the close link between Sam Nujoma and the country. It also showcases a painting

²²⁵ Melber, 2005, "Namibia's Past in the Present": 102.

²²⁶ Becker, 2011, "Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana": 522.

²²⁷ Esther Muinjangué, 2018, Personal communication with author, February 16.

entitled 'The Attack on Omugulugwombashe'. The events of Omugulugwombashe are incorporated into the Swapo master narrative, which has marked it as the beginning of the struggle for independence. It is celebrated and remembered as the first military action undertaken by Swapo, despite the fact that the attack was unanticipated and was a military defeat. August 26, the day of the South African attack on Omugulugwombashe in 1966, is celebrated as the national holiday Heroes' Day in Namibia. However, there exists another Heroes' Day that is "observed by Nama-speaking communities to commemorate the death of Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi".²²⁸ For Herero-speakers, there are several Heroes' Days that are observed by the different leaders of families, which also culminate in a day of celebration by the communities. It is important to note that these unofficial Heroes' Days centre on the early history of the German-Nama and German-Herero wars, and represent a rejection and deviation from the Swapo master narrative and who it celebrates as the country's heroes. The placement of 'The Attack on Omugulugwombashe' at the end of the 'Colonial Repression Gallery' attests to the adherence of the museum to the Swapo master narrative, utilizing a Swapo battle to signal the end of repression and the beginning of warfare for liberation. To emphasise this further, the last exhibit in the 'Colonial Repression' gallery proclaims the 'The Formation of Swapo', gives the date 19 April 1960, and displayed are photographs of a young Sam Nujoma and Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo. Although Sam Nujoma is the father of the nation, it was Toivo Ya Toivo who founded the party. No acknowledgement is made of Swapo's predecessor the OPO, or Namibia's oldest political party SWANU formed in 1959. This is a clear signalling that is less of an independence museum as much as it is a Swapo museum.

²²⁸ Zuern, 2012, "Memorial Politics": 499.



Fig. 8 The Attack on Omugulugwombashe

Upon entering the ‘Liberation War’ gallery, one is met with the sight of a life-size (plastic) military tanker, setting the tone for the entire gallery which is explicitly militaristic. The content of this gallery, in its masculine and militarist imagery and symbolism, adheres to the Swapo master narrative in which the liberation war was won ‘through the barrel of a gun’. Heike Becker argues that the prioritisation of the armed struggle conducted from exile in Swapo’s ‘foundation myth’ “legitimizes and authorizes the power of the post-colonial elite as the sole, heroic liberators from apartheid and colonialism”.²²⁹ However, the ‘through the barrel of the gun’ narrative contradicts evidence that SWAPO military actions were not that successful, that it was more so the inability of South Africa to continue and justify its mandate rule and the intervention of the UN that actually turned the tide in favour of independence.²³⁰ As such, we need to question what is to be gained by Swapo exaggerating the success and significance of the period of Swapo-led military action. One answer is that it was through the taking up of an armed

²²⁹ Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”: 520.

²³⁰ See Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”; Melber, “‘Namibia, land of the brave’: selective memories on war and violence within nation building”; Kössler, 2007, “Facing a Fragmented Past”.

liberation struggle, which no other liberation organisation in Namibia decided upon, that SWAPO was recognized as the “sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people” United Nations General Assembly in 1976.²³¹ The title of Sam Nujoma’s autobiography *Where Others Waivered* (2001) is arguably in reference to the choice to take up arms, disparaging of those who ‘waivered’. Thus, the armed struggle is a vital justifying factor for Swapo’s claim to universal representation of the Namibian people and continued political hegemony and power in post-independence. The museum can thus be seen as another example of how Swapo legitimizes party rule, in the same way Tycho van der Hoog argues that Heroes’ Acre does.²³²

Totally unrepresented in this gallery are the experiences of those Namibians who lived through the liberation war, as combatants but especially as civilians. Photographs are displayed in exhibits such as such as ‘Conventional Warfare’ and ‘Guerrilla Operations’. Predominantly these photographs are of men in uniform, attesting to the military-masculinity complex that drives the narrative of ‘through the barrel of the gun’. There is very little contextual information provided as to how people went into exile, where they would go or how they would live. However, life within Namibia for non-combatants during the liberation war is not included in any way. One exhibit entitled ‘Civilian Support for PLAN Combatants’ includes a painting depicting women helping a wounded soldier, a man and a woman in embrace suggestive of a romantic relationship between a combatant and a civilian, and images of people celebrating and providing strategic assistance.²³³ The implication is that there were good, mutually beneficial relationships between combatants and civilians.

²³¹ Christopher Saunders, 2003, “Liberation and Democracy”: 94.

²³² See van der Hoog, 2017, “North Korean monuments in Southern Africa”.

²³³ The People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) was the military wing of SWAPO.



Fig. 9 Military tanker in the Liberation War gallery

This bears resemblance to Terri Barnes critique of the ‘classic nationalist narrative’ where the Zimbabwean government projected the image of the benevolent soldier and promoted the idea that liberation army soldiers were “welcomed, protected and supported by rural people”, as they sometimes were, but there is also irrefutable evidence to the contrary which goes ignored.²³⁴ In Namibia too the reality is that there are more ‘complex histories’ where PLAN combatants were sometimes feared by Namibian civilians just as much as the South African soldiers.²³⁵ These histories still exist in oral form, forming counter memory to the master narrative but kept alive by those who continue to share their stories such as with researcher Heike Becker. Kris Brown noted a strategy to combat elite memorialisation from the top which poses the risk of dividing rather than uniting societies post conflict. Specifically, it was to encourage commemoration at grassroots and community levels, which “puts non-combatants on the commemorative foreground, specifically in a way that brings out hidden stories and

²³⁴ Terri Barnes, 2006, “Flame: A Zimbabwean Story”, in *Black and White in Colour: African History On Screen*, ed. Richard Mendelsohn and Vivian Bickford-Smith (Athens: Ohio University Press): 7.

²³⁵ Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”: 523.

discourses”, exactly that which is missing in the Independence Memorial Museum.²³⁶ Oral history methodology can be useful in supporting and disseminating counter memory, as it “claims to be more democratic than other historiographical methodologies because it provides an alternative viewpoint from below, a viewpoint that conventional methodology disenfranchises”.²³⁷ At the Johannesburg Apartheid Museum, oral history has been recorded in the forms of ordinary people speaking about their experiences of apartheid. Videos accompanying exhibits such as ‘The Significance of 1976’, where adults speak of their involvement in the protests as youths, provide historical testimony that one does not have access to in other formats. Unlike early resistance history, there are Namibians alive today who lived through the liberation war. Their insights and testament could have provided content for the Independence Memorial Museum such as at the Johannesburg Apartheid Museum. The inclusion of first-hand narratives not only creates a valuable archive, but contributes to a visitor’s ability to empathise and relate to a history they might have no other connection with. What is ‘risked’ for Swapo would be the coming to light of stories of “betrayal and killings” alluded to by Heike Becker.²³⁸ The motivation behind excluding such history from below is twofold and arguably an act of self-preservation. An ordinary history that does not privilege and centre Swapo is one which is perceived as dangerous as it derails the notion of the single liberator, but worse yet would be a history that details the harms and violations committed by Swapo, derailing the notion of Swapo as the people’s party.

Perhaps one of the most shockingly irreverent exhibits at the Independence Memorial Museum is the room dedicated to the Cassinga Massacre. A statue of a bomb, with human figures carved within it, sits in the middle of this room, with the words ‘Kassinga!! Accuse’ written on the base. A large wall mural is entitled ‘Massacre of Namibians by South African Apartheid Regime: The Cassinga Massacre 4th May 1978’. Another mural depicts the aftermath of the attack, the destroyed camp ablaze and bodies strewn on the ground. The last mural, ‘Attacks on Refugee Camp’, shows the destroyed settlement.

²³⁶ Brown, 2013, “Commemoration as Symbolic Reparation”: 286.

²³⁷ Olick and Robbins, 1998, “Social Memory Studies”: 126.

²³⁸ Becker, 2011, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana”: 523.



Fig. 10 The bomb statue, reads "Kassinga!! Accuse"



Fig. 11 Massacre of Namibian by South African Apartheid Regime: The Cassinga Massacre 4th May, 1978



Fig. 12 A close up of the Cassinga Massacre mural

The Cassinga Massacre was an attack by the South African Defence Force on a Swapo camp in Angola. Women, teenagers and children accounted for more than half of the 624 deaths. Both Swapo's insistence that it was a refugee camp, and the apartheid government's insistence that it was a military base, are somewhat misleading.²³⁹ At the time SWAPO used Cassinga, as further justification for the liberation war, emphasising the cold-blooded attack by South African forces on innocent civilian women and children. As such, within the Swapo master narrative, that Cassinga was a refugee camp has been maintained and is exclusively referred to as such in this exhibit. Moreover, the Cassinga exhibit makes use of highly sexualised representations of women's bodies. In the mural, women's breasts are exposed and their clothing torn, with connotations of sexual violence although no evidence of this happening at the Cassinga massacre exists. Representation of violence in this manner is not necessarily commemoration, its graphic and sexualized nature detracts rather than contributes from its cathartic value. Again, it relates to Henning Melber's assertion that the glorification narrative leaves no room for 'true mourning'. In terms of how this contributes to and echoes Swapo's narrative, the choice to display women in this exhibit, in numbers unprecedented in the rest of the museum, is to draw on the idea that women were victims for whom Swapo were fighting. The nudity only further implies the vulnerability of women. In one still, a teddy bear can be seen next to a woman with bared breast, the implication is possibly that she is a mother who has lost a child. Aside from the artistic renderings, there is no information provided as to what happened at Cassinga. Nor is there any reference to the ways in which people at Cassinga countered and resisted the attack, they are only represented as victims without agency, which is compounded by the over representation of women and children bearing the brunt of the attack. The next section will expand upon the representation of women in the museum.

Women in the Independence Memorial Museum

In 2005, Sam Nujoma was "accorded the official title *Founding Father of the Namibian Nation* by an act of parliament".²⁴⁰ In terms of a mother of the nation, no woman has been celebrated in the same way as Sam Nujoma. As the father figurehead, Sam Nujoma is ascribed power, status and social capital;

²³⁹ See Christian Williams, 2010, "'Remember Cassinga?' An Exhibition of Photographs and Histories", *Kronos* (36).

²⁴⁰ Kornees, 2013, "Negotiating 'silent reconciliation'": 2.

it is the embodiment of patriarchy in action. That there is no mother means that no woman has been granted the same power or is acknowledged and revered in the same way. Yet the nation itself is gendered as female. Martha Akawa notes that one's "motherland, as many nations are referred to, is appropriated as maternal and there is a strong desire (always masculine) to love, possess, protect and even die for her".²⁴¹ The inherent irony is that Namibia is a motherland with no mother. The construction of the nation as female thus serves a purpose: it motivates love, support and defence of the nation. It is a tactic of nationalism that helps to define the nation, and thus traditional gender roles are inscribed into political culture. Gendering the nation as female evokes the need for it to be defended. The representation of women as victims without agency in the 'Cassinga' exhibit is an extension of this.

There are several instances in the museum where women are excluded and written out of the historical narrative. In the 'Chamber of Horrors', only two female figures are represented. One as a brass relief on the wall, holding a young child with a broken chain attached to her outstretched arm as if in a defensive position. The other a statue of a woman, cradling a man in chains, reminiscent of Michelangelo's Virgin Mary cradling Jesus. What is curious about this exhibit, and these two representations of the female body, is that the genocide famously targeted women and children, along with men. The extermination order read: *Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at.* The chamber, however, only presents male figures as suffering the genocide as seen in the brass reliefs on the wall. The two women are posited in a traditional gender role of providing nurture and care, and responsibility for children. Arguably they represent femininity, but not the reality of women during the genocide. This lack of representation misconstrues the way in which the extermination order affected women equally alongside men. Why women are excluded in this exhibit cannot really be explained in terms of the self-serving Swapo master narrative, however, it does attest to the masculine bias of such a narrative which always assumes a person is male;

²⁴¹ Akawa, 2014, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle*: 84.

when photographs show women in the ‘Liberation War’ gallery, they are consistently referred to as ‘female combatants’, but photographs depicting men do not differentiate by stating ‘male combatants’.



Fig. 13 A statue portrays a woman cradling a man in chains

Another exhibit where women are excluded is ‘Namibian Political Prisoners on Robben Island’ in the ‘Colonial Repression’ gallery. As Robben Island was a men’s prison, no women are acknowledged in this exhibit, despite the fact that many were imprisoned over the years by the South African regime.²⁴² As such, only men are represented here as political prisoners and the narratives of women who were imprisoned elsewhere in South Africa and Namibia for their political beliefs and actions are excluded and invisibilised within the political prisoner narrative. Women such as Ida Jimmy, Rauna Nambinga and Anna Nghaihondjwa are as much deserving of recognition as the men who were imprisoned on Robben Island, but they are ignored, the specific harms they suffered as female prisoners remain unacknowledged. The glorification narrative that informs the Independence Memorial Museum can

²⁴² See Akawa, 2014, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle*.

perhaps explain this, as no other prison holds as much political capital and infamy as Robben Island, thus their inclusion is deemed unnecessary.



Fig. 14 Male Namibian Political Prisoners on Robben Island

Generally, the effort to include women in the 'Liberation War' gallery is superficial and relies solely on visual representation. Women are depicted in photographs, albeit in fewer numbers, alongside men as members of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). Women are shown carrying weapons and in uniform. Martha Akawa addresses the idea that women did indeed fight alongside men in PLAN. She notes that although not equal in numbers, many women were PLAN fighters on the frontlines. More were nurses than combatants, but some did see active battle and women participated in multifaceted

ways “as combatants, spies, providers of food, information, etc.”²⁴³ Her critique is that despite this, women often did not make it into leadership positions within the military unit, and that then and now Swapo leadership is dominated by men.²⁴⁴ While Swapo pushed the idea that the liberation war was also a fighting front for gender equality, in reality, they were not stepping up to the plate in rewarding women with positions in leadership. It is also noteworthy that the only woman named in the gallery is Aira Shikwambi, a member of the Executive Committee of the Swapo Women’s Council. No exhibition is dedicated to the Swapo Women’s Council, which did important work such as mobilising, educating, and fundraising for the cause as well representing the women of Swapo and advocating for all Namibian women. More generally, there is no exhibit which addresses the reality of women’s contributions or suffering within the liberation struggle, such as the sexual exploitation of women in camps in exile.²⁴⁵ Akawa notes how Swapo thus uses a dual representation of women. On the one hand, they were glorified as active and equal fighters in the war for liberation, but they were also represented as victims in an attempt to rally domestic and international outrage at the South African occupation and thus rally support for Swapo.²⁴⁶ Both representations of women can be seen in the Independence Memorial Museum. That women were victims to Swapo perpetrators of gender based violence is silenced and omitted.

The question of why women are so under and misrepresented, in this museum and in its origins in the Swapo based narrative of liberation history, might have several answers. One which particularly strikes a chord is Martha Akawa’s notion that the “issue of gendered politics seems to have been neglected in the historiography to date as it has the potential of staining the sanitized and heroic version of the liberation struggle”.²⁴⁷ The perpetration of gender based violence, rife in the exile camps, would problematise the notion of Swapo as liberator. Thus Swapo deliberately writes gender politics out of the narrative, or simply relies on a binary notion of women in the war. Of course, the dual representation of women, as equal participants and as vulnerable victims, misses the nuance, fluidity and complexity

²⁴³ Akawa, 2014, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle*: 12.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*: 2.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

of women and their varied roles in the struggle. Women are considered only in as much as their inclusion helps to legitimate Swapo's ideology and projected image of itself. Women are represented simply as representations, idealised in their femininity, and not as complex, living and breathing actors in this particular narrative. The museum's particular oversight of women and gender politics only goes to show that politics, history and glory are still a man's game.

Expunging the Record

Lastly, what is achieved in the Independence Memorial Museum is an expunging of the record of gross human rights violations perpetrated by Swapo, in line with the master narrative of liberation history. Excluded from the museum are the same controversies that have never been addressed in official history or investigated with any consequence, such as the Lubango dungeons and sexual abuse in Swapo exile camps. Where the museum could have offered a space in which to grapple with these issues, they have yet again been silenced and excluded. Also excluded in the museum is the existence of other liberation movement and political parties whose existence pose a threat to the notion of Swapo as the 'one true liberator', unto which their political hegemony post-independence is predicated. The narrative put forward by the museum is simply the version of history that Swapo wishes to put forward, that which shows it in the most favourable light. Included are actors and events that proffer Swapo as the true and singular liberators of the Namibian people. Symbolically, Swapo and Sam Nujoma are conflated with the Namibian nation through the repetitive iconisation of Nujoma throughout the museum. The museum ends with a mural, 'Long Live Namibian Independence!', showcasing the diversity of the Namibian nation. The Swapo colours, red, green and blue, shine out from the sun, and an outline of Sam Nujoma is painted above and larger than the rest of the figures. An obvious attempt at inclusion (presented nowhere else in the museum) shows a white farmer, a man in a wheelchair, and a female domestic worker. Where women once held guns, they now hold brooms. The women in this mural represent a regression back to the placing of women in traditional roles such as cleaners and schoolteachers.



Fig. 15 Long Live Namibian Independence!

The Independence Memorial Museum essentially fails in its titular functions, as a museum and a memorial. In as much as a museum should provide educational and archival outcomes, this museum is grossly uninformative and relies upon interpretive North Korean art. As a memorial, it succeeds only in as much as a memorial erected in the honour of a political party by the very same political party can: a self-serving tool of propaganda. As a form of reparation or commemoration for those who died, and for those who survived but suffered harm and loss in the struggle for independence, there is little-to-no justice or remedy offered by the Independence Memorial Museum. The exhibit for the genocide in the museum and the monument outside do not even acknowledge the identity of those who were the victims. Neither is there any acknowledgement of the proliferation of the legacy of the genocide into independence, where reparations from the German government are still being demanded and denied at every turn. Likewise, independence is presented at the end of the museum as a celebration, but there is no actual engagement with Namibia as an independent state. This seems odd in an Independence Memorial Museum. I would argue that this attests to the use of history in the museum as a conduit for the retrospective legitimization of Swapo. As opposed to reflecting on what has changed in Namibia since

1990, the museum reads as a history lesson aiming to make us forget the trials and tribulations of the present through the grandeur of the past.

Conclusion

The research presented here has attempted to critically analyse the Independence Memorial Museum and the particular version of history it puts forth. Having been commissioned by the state, and where in Namibia this is effectively a single party state which can be described as a form of ‘democratic authoritarianism’, it is safe to presume that the Swapo Party of Namibia had unrestricted influence and control over the construction of the museum. The 2011 motion by SWANU president and Herero leader Usutuaije Maamberua to rename the museum ‘The Genocide Remembrance Centre’ is one testament to this. Moreover, the evidence of this resides within the Independence Memorial Museum itself. My research interest in the museum began with a visit in 2016, where I could not reconcile with the fact that Swapo was presented as the singular contributor to the achievement of independence, as such it struck me as a Swapo museum more than one which gave an honest account of how the struggle for independence was waged in Namibia. Thus began an investigation into how a liberation history had previously been constructed and sanctioned by the Swapo state.

An analysis of the Independence Museum required an investigation into memory politics in Namibia. Based on literature research on the politics of memory and memorialisation in Namibia, a framework of reference was identified in the notion of a Swapo master narrative of liberation history. The concept of a ‘master narrative’ of history, utilized throughout this research, refers to the ways in which Swapo has been shown to selectively and subjectively remember and construct the past, creating an official or public history which is always favourable to the party. It puts forward a singular and universalised national history of Namibia, claiming liberation as the national history of the country. The foundation myth of many other southern African countries has been based on the theme of liberation and this is not unique to the rule of Swapo in Namibia. Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique and South Africa to varying degrees all have their own master narratives of history. However, the newly built Independence Memorial Museum inaugurated in 2014 offers new insight into the longevity of Swapo’s master narrative twenty-four years into independence.

The creation of an authoritative master narrative was reliant upon certain conditions prior to and following the transition to independence. Arguably this begins in 1976 with the recognition of SWAPO

as the 'sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people' by UN resolution 31/146. Moving forward into the period of transition, the government's Policy of National Reconciliation put forward the notion that reconciliation in Namibia could not be achieved by delving into the past and must look forward to a united future. As such, no transitional justice mechanisms were employed, apart from the deployment of amnesty for political crimes committed in the past. Although this was arguably a norm for the time, four years later when South Africa began its truth commission process, the Namibian state declined an invitation to become involved in the TRC for crimes the South African apartheid state committed on Namibian soil. Up till today, calls for similar processes of investigating truth have been refused by the state, still citing the Policy of National Reconciliation. Scholars and analysts have come to understand this policy as one of 'silent reconciliation', reliant upon amnesty and amnesia for crimes committed in the past. As opposed to the genuine belief in the policy to achieve peace and reconciliation, authors like John Saul and Colin Leys assert that "Swapo's desire to cover its own tracks that does indeed provide the most convincing explanation of the path the movement has chosen".²⁴⁸ Without the impetus on discovering and creating a record of the truth, such as was attempted by the TRC, truth has been defined and sanctioned in the official sphere almost singularly by Swapo as compared with South Africa, which has a more balanced and ground-up record of truth.

What motivates the Swapo master narrative, and what it accomplishes, is a means by which the history of liberation is utilised to legitimate Swapo as the true and sole liberator of the Namibian people, in an attempt to secure continued loyalty in a post-independence era where Swapo is increasingly being criticised and questioned. The Independence Memorial Museum can thus be read as a consolidation and continuation of this narrative, intended to convey the message to the Namibian people, 'remember who liberated you'. As such, in the Swapo-based narrative of liberation history "Swapo is equated with liberation and support for Swapo with patriotism".²⁴⁹ It tends to limit 'the struggle' to the period of Swapo's armed resistance post-1966. In writing out resistance narratives that pre-date Swapo or non-Swapo contributions to liberation, the party centres itself in the story of national liberation. Where it is

²⁴⁸ Saul and Leys, 2003, "Lubango and After": 337.

²⁴⁹ Zuern, 2012, "Memorial Politics": 497.

acknowledged, there is a creation of a form of historic continuity in regards to early resistance and the later Swapo-led resistance, where Swapo is shown to have taken up the flame of resistance from their forefathers. Linking the early resistance to the later Swapo armed struggle allows for the notion that Swapo represents the liberation history of the nation, and therefore represents the nation itself, as a whole. Excluded from the master narrative are actors and events that destabilise the image of Swapo as the benevolent liberator, such as the 'spy drama', the Lubango Dungeons and widespread gender based violence within the exile camps. Even those who detract from the notion of Swapo as the singular liberator are excluded, such as other political parties, trade unions, Churches and the effects of student mobilisation. In particular, the dealing of the state with the Herero and Nama genocide of 1904-08, both in the past and in the museum, reflects the 'aggressive nationalism' of the party which rejects differences in ethnic and regional histories in favour of a unified history that presents all Namibians as having suffered equally under colonialism. This has influenced the government's varying support for the Nama and Herero reparations movements over time, and also the conspicuous lack of state-led commemoration of the genocide.

Drawing upon the existent literature on the subject of memory politics in Namibia, this research utilized photography and critical thematic analysis to interrogate the Independence Memorial Museum in reference to the identified Swapo master narrative of liberation history. The museum was found to be in direct keeping with the already established narrative, with the very same inclusions and exclusions in the narrative incorporated or missing from the museum. The same themes were identified in each, including the treatment of early resistance and genocide history, liberation through the barrel of the gun, the representation of women in the liberation struggle and an expunging of the record of gross human rights abuses perpetrated by the SWAPO liberation movement. Early resistance history and the genocide, when acknowledged in the museum, are presented vaguely and with no concrete information as to the differences in experiences of different ethnic groups. In particular, this is an affront to the memory of the genocide and the legacy of it which still affects the Nama and Herero people who were targeted by the German colonial army. There is also an explicit linking between the early resistance and Swapo, with Sam Nujoma iconised throughout the 'Colonial Repression' gallery and its closure with

the 'Formation of SWAPO 1960'. The notion that liberation was won 'through the barrel the gun' in the master narrative is repeated in the museum with the exaggeration and glorification of Swapo military actions. Ordinary, human stories of struggle and resistance are silenced in favour of the grandeur of armed war. Particularly, the experiences of women during the struggle are unaddressed in both the master narrative and the museum, as the mode of militarism through which this history was written is explicitly masculine and patriarchal. More generally, women are misrepresented, essentialised and invisibilised in the museum. This is not a unique phenomenon by any means. The misunderstanding and misconstruing of women's varied roles in conflict has been experienced in the aftermath of almost every conflict that has ever occurred. The representation of women and their contributions to the liberation movement, within and outside of Swapo, at the Independence Memorial Museum is extremely problematic, women are both under represented and misrepresented, visible and invisible at the same time. The inclusion of women in the museum uncritically presents women as undifferentiated actors in the struggle relying exclusively on visual representation, uses them as tokens in an effort to the achievement of gender equality, present them as victims whose honour Swapo defended, and pigeonholes women into traditional gender roles. There is no engagement with women as historical actors in their own right, their experiences or contributions to liberation. Finally, in terms of expunging the record, within the museum there is simply no reference or testimony to Swapo's own gross human rights abuses in exile. While the museum could have presented an opportunity for Swapo to acknowledge this history and grapple with it in an honest way, the exclusion indicates how now more than ever Swapo is adhering to and consolidating the master narrative it created to protect and legitimize itself.

What should be mourned in the Independence Memorial Museum is the loss of the opportunity to remedy the harms of silence that have been borne by the Namibian people. Ex-detainees, those affected by the legacy of the genocide, female combatants and the ordinary citizens who experienced South African occupation, civil war and struggle – one day these memories and narratives will be harder to access and those who visit the Independence Memorial Museum in future will find no archive or even hint of them within its walls. The Swapo master narrative, its creation and motivation, offers an

explanation as to why the Independence Memorial Museum continues these silences into the independence era. In conclusion, I suggest we sit with the understanding of memory politics offered by Milan Kundera:

“The struggle of man [sic] against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Milan Kundera, 1996, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (London: Faber and Faber): 4.

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